The AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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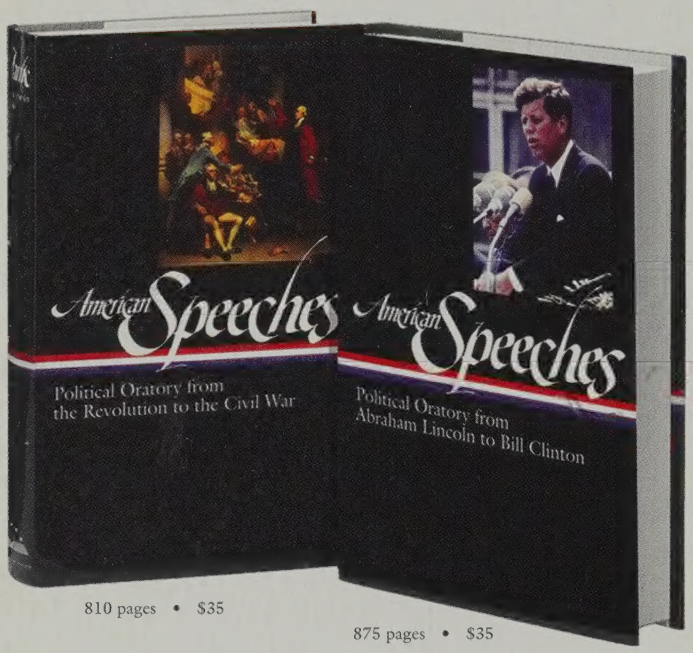
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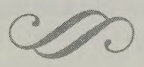

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EDITOR'S NOTE

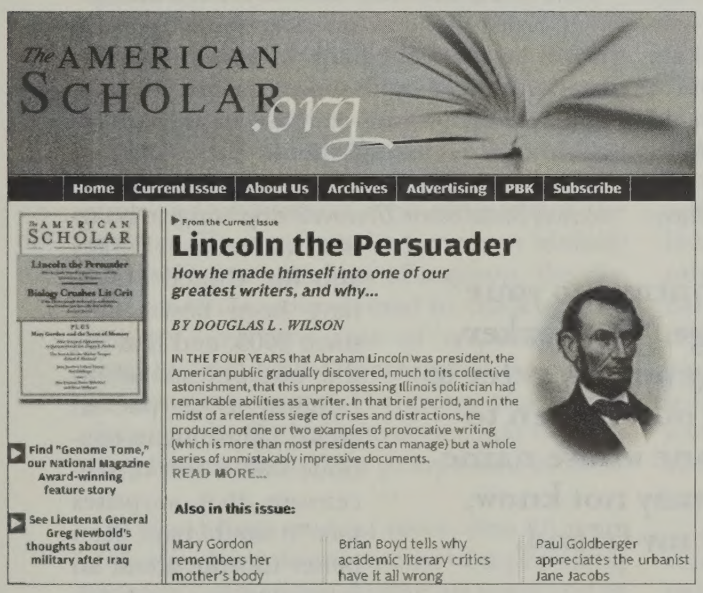
A Walk Around the Block

TO LOOK BACK AT THE 75-year history of this magazine is, for me as its editor, to flirt with paralysis. I knew from the moment I took the job two years ago not to take up a Greek nom de plume and compete as an essayist with my two distinguished predecessors, Aristides and Philonoë. And although I scanned the lists of editorial-board members and contributors from the magazine's past, noting the Niebuhrs and Barzuns and Tuchmans and so forths, I've tried to focus instead on two names associated with the magazine that humble us all equally: Ralph Waldo. What I draw from Emerson, and especially from his 1837 speech "The American Scholar," is the urgent need to get the magazine out of the study and take it for a walk around the block. However simplistic an analysis this might be, it has kept paralysis at a distance. But an anniversary such as the 75th, especially for something as ephemeral as a magazine, deserves acknowledgment and even celebration. To do that I thought to ask two writers I admire, both contributing editors, to read through the entire run of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR and to bring back, in one instance, a brief history of the magazine and in the other a selection of representative extracts from that history. Too much reverence in these matters would not do at all, and so Ted Widmer, a supple and witty historian, has reported that the stream of deep thoughts, intriguing studies, and deathless prose has at times been less than robust. Rich Nicholls, a literary critic of serious mien, however, reminds us while introducing the excerpts that what has been both steady and admirable over the decades is a habit of mind that embraces seriousness and the democratic notion that seriousness trickles down into the culture at large.

READING THE EXCERPTS WE PUBLISH HERE, and a much larger selection from which they were drawn, has heartened me in a way I could not have predicted. I might have guessed, had I thought to, at Widmer's message that even the mighty Homer nods. But the message of Nicholls's excerpts is something subtler, that the nature of seriousness itself has changed over the years within the pages of the SCHOLAR. The great thoughts of great men (and only a very few women) from the early decades can seem just a bit ponderous—serious in a way that feels disembodied today. My impression is that, as the decades rolled along, the arguments became more specific, more rooted in particular cases or in personal experiences, more dependent on narrative. The magazine has moved, broadly, from subjects to stories. I do not believe that there has been an accompanying diminution of seriousness. Look at Brian Boyd's essay critiquing Theory in our last issue or Ethan Fishman's essay in this one, which begins with a famous SCHOLAR article by Richard Hofstadter and to my mind deep-

ens and extends it. But look, too, at the memoir herein by James McConkey, no less serious in its intentions than anything in the magazine's history and yet humble and anecdotal in its approach to the reader, an approach that would feel alien, I suspect, to the magazine's first editors.

This message of change, if that is what it is, has been delivered in a package that has changed surprisingly little over the years. We have embarked on the most radical possible new course in this department, and yet one that is at least a decade overdue. The SCHOLAR at last has a credible Web site of its own, *theamericanscholar.org,* thanks to the design talent of Florence Altenburger and David Herbick, and the computer talent of Chris Kelly and Erik Meier. For the present, the site's content will be drawn almost exclusively from the print magazine, and the site's archive, which we expect at some time to include the whole 75 years, freely available to everyone, is as yet far from complete. But here we are at last in a world beyond paper, where the good ideas of our writers, felicitously expressed, can rebound through space and time—if not infinitely then to a degree that we cannot imagine. Come join us online to renew a subscription or register a complaint. We hope that each time you return you'll find that we've offered something new. Our excitement about the fresh, colorful look of the Web site has made us wish to apply a little rouge to the print magazine itself. Watch for a series of small changes in the issues to come, beginning here with a new cover stock that allows us to use color even more recklessly than we have in the past. Or not.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Lincoln the Persuader
How he made himself into one of our greatest writers, and why...
BY DOUGLAS L. WILSON
IN THE FOUR YEARS that Abraham Lincoln was president, the American public gradually discovered, much to its collective astonishment, that this unprepossessing Illinois politician had remarkable abilities as a writer. In that brief period, and in the midst of a relentless siege of crises and distractions, he produced not one or two examples of provocative writing (which is more than most presidents can manage) but a whole series of unmistakably impressive documents.
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See Lieutenant General Greg Newbold's thoughts about our military after Iraq
Also in this issue:
Mary Gordon remembers her mother's body
Brian Boyd tells why academic literary critics have it all wrong
Paul Goldberger appreciates the urbanist Jane Jacobs

Editors come and go around here with what, from the editor's point of view, seems like alarming frequency. But luckily for its writers and readers, the SCHOLAR's managing editor and associate editor do not. Jean Stipicevic is well into her fourth decade in these precincts. Sandra Costich is more than halfway through her third. Both retain an invigorating love of language and an unshakable allegiance to the *Chicago Manual of Style* and to the way a person named Joe, also of Chicago, used to do things.

The Phi Beta Kappa Society has paid the bills for this magazine for its entire history, and recently the society's governing committee renewed its commitment to do so in the future, while expressing as ever the sensible wish to see those bills be as small as possible. Why do they do it? For a reason that, as best I can determine, has never changed even a little bit. They believe the magazine offers something of value to the culture. We'd like to continue to prove them right.

—ROBERT WILSON

LETTER FROM ISTANBUL

By Suzanne Scanlon

The Group

"You are an American soldier. You have one mission and one mission only: To protect your country and to fight against the enemy." Gözde reads the opening lines of her story to the creative-writing workshop I teach at Koç University. I am the only American present in the classroom at the English language, American-modeled school in Istanbul; all of my students, about a dozen young people, are Turkish.

"You love the respect that people show towards you," Gözde continues. "You feel proud and important when they applaud each 4th of July. You feel confident in your uniform since no one cares if you are good-looking or not, or whether you are an African-American or Hispanic. You know that you are superior to the rest of the society. You are very well aware that you have to do just one thing: follow the orders.... They tell you to wear your uniform and appear on ceremony; you wear it and appear in the ceremony. They tell you to go to Iraq and kill some people there; you go and kill."

In contrast to your average New Yorker, Turks generally refer to each other, even to someone whose name they may not know, as my friend.

When she finishes reading, silence pervades the classroom. The usually talkative and lively students look around at each other and at me, saying nothing. I try to open the discussion on matters of craft: What did they make of the writer's provocative use of the second-person voice? How did it work or not work in the story? Finally, slowly and thoughtfully, Duygu speaks: "I don't think you should write like this—about American soldiers. It is crude and disrespectful, I think." Buðra adds, "I think it is overdetermined. It's too much."

Gözde's fictional American soldier goes on to kill an innocent Iraqi, whose death, years later, is avenged by his son, a Harvard law graduate. It's an obvious exercise in anti-Americanism, a recurring theme these days in Turkish popular culture. (*Metal Storm* and its sequel *Metal Storm II,* novels depicting an imagined war between Turkey and the United States, have been best sellers since 2005, and that fall the authors spoke on campus to a packed crowd.) My students continue with a sort of self-censure that surprises me. "It would have been better to write about an imaginary war, or a soldier from a made-up country," Özgün offers.

I give up on form and turn obliquely to substance. Why, I ask, are they offended? After all, I, the only American in the room, was not. Current events are valid subject matter for fictional treatment, I say. I offer such concrete suggestions as maintaining a consistent voice and point of view and delineating the characters with more particular insight. This relaxes some students who see that I can tolerate criticism of my country, but most of them remain noticeably uncomfortable throughout the discussion.

The next morning Buðra comes to my office. "What did you think of that story yesterday?" he asks. I don't answer right away, and he offers his opinion, more revealing than he would have allowed in the workshop:

Suzanne Scanlon's essays and reviews have appeared in *The Review of Contemporary Fiction, CONTEXT, Chicago Life,* and online at *elimae.com.*

"I thought it was cheap, an easy shot. The students here—you don't know, but there is a conspiracy theory going around among the Turkish youth, fueled by nationalists. They think that the U.S. is going to go from Iraq to Syria to the Turkish border, eventually taking away our land." Buðra claims to have "a larger understanding" because he's an international-relations major. (International relations is what Turks call political science, a term that was squeezed out of the academy in the 1980s by a military dictatorship that feared the Marxist implications of studying politics.) I don't ask him to elaborate about how his understanding coincided with his taking offense to a story that depicts American soldiers committing war crimes.

By then I had thought about what had happened the previous day in my writing workshop and understood a bit more about the tension. The students had come to identify themselves as members of a group; the discussion of the story seemed to challenge the group's unwritten rule of respecting the teacher (me); and respecting me meant not insulting my country. The group takes precedence in the Turkish classroom, and Gözde's story had threatened the group's cohesiveness.

As a college student more than 10 years ago, I was keenly aware of a prevailing sense of competition among my peers and of their struggles to impress the professor. Later, when I first taught in the United States, I thought it necessary to put a note in the syllabus: "The classroom, like a city or country, is also a community, and for it to function properly, individual students must participate. As we read about other communities, students are reminded to pay attention to their own community (the classroom)." That caution seems unnecessary in Turkey.

When I arrived in Istanbul one year ago, I romanticized the Turkish view of collective culture. After all, couldn't an individualistic cultural emphasis, as we have in the United States, correlate with the high rates of depression we experience? My own experience of living in New York City as a student seemed to intensify my sense of isolation, and isn't living in isolation a defining characteristic of Americans today?

In contrast to your average New Yorker, Turks generally refer to each other, even to someone whose name they may not know, as *my friend.* My students, from the very first day of class, typically begin an assertion with *As my friend said* or *I agree with my friend.* Cliques and in-groups, visible on campus, pretty much vanish in the classroom. The nerds, the alternatives, and the scholarship kids are as important to the group as the nouveau riche, the bourgeois, and the high-society Istanbullu commuters.

Strong group identity usually works to the advantage of individual students and sometimes for the class as a whole. In one stellar class, the very motivated students seemed to keep the slacker minority silent, and the average students were pressured into working harder than they might have done among other less enthusiastic and dedicated students. Toward the end of the semester, a student told me that they had shared mobile phone numbers and had called each other with questions or concerns the night before a major assignment was due. The success of some students was surely influenced by the group's collective motivation.

A member of that class wrote her final research paper on the challenges of cross-cultural adaptation for foreign students. She hoped to study someday in a foreign country and was curious about the difficulties she might encounter. "It is hard to explain," she said in a conference with me, "but in your culture you don't think of your friend all the time; in our culture, we do. I know that my friend is thinking about me as much as he is thinking about himself."

Her analysis seemed simplistic, but I didn't interrupt. "No offense, but your culture is a bit more . . ." She paused, and gave me an apologetic smile. "It is more selfish." I wasn't offended. This, too, is a cultural difference: the degree to which they respect me as the instructor and worry that I might take offense. In my experience, very little respect is shown to an instructor—at least to one who is youngish and female—in American universi-

ties. My Turkish student may be right; the American mindset may be more selfish. Paradoxically, Koç is an "American-modeled" and "English-medium" university, as the promotional materials put it. In the Pre-University English Language Center here, only American teachers are hired, and the Turkish professors in the various departments hold Ph.D.'s from top-ranked U.S. universities. Although a number of students are on scholarship, Koç students generally come from wealthy families who want them to receive a U.S. academic experience without having to go to America. Some will attend graduate school in the United States; others will stay here or in Europe, obtaining jobs with multinational companies that value the ability to speak English and, in many cases, American-accented English.

And so I sometimes wonder if it would be a disservice to allow them to retain their collective way of thinking. When I arrived here in the fall of 2005, I attended a preparatory workshop set up by Turkish psychology professor Zeynep Aycan. We new teachers were instructed on our cultural differences. "Here is a simple test," Zeynep said, introducing her ideas. "Complete this phrase: I am. . . ." She looked at me.

"I am Suzanne," I said. "I am Anna," the woman next to me answered. "Marlisa," a third American responded.

"A highly individualistic sense of identity," Zeynep observed. "If you ask our students, they might say *I am the son of so-and-so. I am the brother of so-and-so.* This is one easy indicator of a very different way of being in the world." The danger, she said, was that with such emphasis placed on the group, one never needed to take individual responsibility. This, combined with a cultural outlook that tended toward the fatalistic could dampen motivation. (This fatalism was borne out after earthquakes, terrorist attacks, an economic crisis, and a lack of jobs for even the college educated; further evidence is a tendency to drive recklessly without using seat belts.)

I've wanted to try Zeynep's test in one of my classrooms to see how it would play out. So far, I haven't. Certainly there are the students who are unmotivated, and I often find myself arguing against their tendency to fall back on the group. I want them to be individuals, and sometimes I want them to simply mind their own business. When assignments are turned back, they all share their scores (much to my chagrin), letting each other read my comments, at times calling out to others across the room to compare results. Later one or another will come to me with a comment like *I had an 80 and my friend had a 78, but she only wrote five pages, and my paper was eight pages.*

Of course, students react this way in a U.S. university, but it is much more widespread here. It's almost required that you let others know your grades, and perhaps this is how the group sets up a hierarchy. At times this tendency makes me feel more alienated than I am, such as when I arrive in class and find students huddled around the desk of someone they've identified as the best student, who is briefing them on the day's reading assignment. By the spring semester, I'd learned enough Turkish to understand when Ege was explaining the difference between Gandhi's definitions of passive resistance and noncooperation and when Enes was relating the plot of *Antigone* to the group. "He might be able to tell you the plot of the play, but it will never be the same as if you had read the play," I'd say. "No one can read for you. You are responsible for your own education, and this means that you must struggle with the text, even if it is challenging. Your friend cannot do that for you."

"Yes, teacher."

I'm not, however, entirely comfortable with my own argument. I want them to read, of course, and I give the same advice to American students. My ambivalence comes from the fact that I am promoting an American model in which individualism equals capitalism, and that isn't what I want to teach. Any time I start lecturing this way—and I've been doing it more and more—I feel ridiculous. I recall being a student, and I realize that most of my students couldn't care less about what I'm saying. The few who understand don't need to be told, and the many who need to be told will not understand.

Students at Koç University in Istanbul: "Cliques and in-groups, visible on campus, pretty much vanish in the classroom."

When I began teaching, I told myself that I would never lecture students in this way. I wouldn't speak down to them. And yet, here I am, one year into my teaching at this university, and I find myself lecturing on such basics as individual responsibility.

Last fall, a less-than-stellar group of students got together the night before the first draft of the research paper was due (they'd known about it for six weeks) and conspired to e-mail me requesting an extension on the due date:

> *Hi Miss Scanlon;*
>
> *well, this mail is about draft of course and i know your decision about the date of our first draft and i know its because our bad behaviors[such as not doýng other homeworks in time].But mercy and comprehension is the most distinguishing factor of human being. So i want mercy and comprehension from you again.I have 2 papers,1 quiz and 1 extremely important midterm this week. This midterm will designate my next term. . . . Me and my friends are all extremely busy and i know that we are unable to do our draft for tomorrow. So can you delay it? like tuesday? Please*

And, a minute later:

> *hi miss Scanlon,*
>
> *I think I will not be able to give my first draft on time. First of all I apologize for this but in the mean time if you'll show a little mercy and comprehension about the taff working conditions of other classes I will really appreciate it and be thankfull to you.*

At least 10 more followed closely in this vein. The next day I found myself lecturing the group on their flawed strategy. The fact that I found a dozen e-mails in my in box that morning, all sent from the dorms the previous night, I said, was far more disturbing to me than if one or two of them had come to me ahead of time asking for an extension or explaining their individual difficulty meeting the due date. "I am far less likely to respond to a group e-mail bombardment, which ultimately will annoy me and perhaps make me less responsive to any claims."

Standing at the front of the class, I go on this way while the students sneak looks and share guilty smiles. In these moments more than any other, I feel myself to be merely playing the role of the teacher, a job ascribed to me through a system established long before I arrived. The performing nature of teaching is something I've always understood. Half of the job seems to be dressing up and playing the part. But here, with the language gap, the honorific bestowed on teachers (*hojam*, which translates as "hero" in Turkish), and various other cultural confusions, it seems even more pronounced.

Given their strong collective identity and unjaded worldview, it would be all too easy for me to languish in this role. But that's the very reason why I must work harder to help them develop critical thinking skills so that they can move from a refreshing lack of skepticism to a healthy dose of it. ❖

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Collected by André Bernard

[*Celebrations*]

We were now at the end of the last long march of the upward journey. Yet with the Pole actually in sight I was too weary to take the last few steps. The accumulated weariness of all those days and nights of forced marches and insufficient sleep, constant peril and anxiety, seemed to roll across me all at once. I was actually too exhausted to realize at the moment that my life's purpose had been achieved. . . . But, weary though I was, I could not sleep long. It was, therefore, only a few hours later when I woke. The first thing I did after awaking was to write these words in my diary: "The Pole at last. The prize of three centuries. My dream and goal for 20 years. Mine at last! I cannot bring myself to realize it. It seems all so simple and commonplace."

—Robert E. Peary
The North Pole, 1910

The emperor was greeted with welcoming cheers, which were echoed from the hills and riverbanks, but in spite of the din he exhibited no emotion, but kept the same impassive air as he commonly wore before his subjects in the provinces. Though he was very short he stooped when he passed under a high gate; otherwise he was like a dummy, gazing straight before him as if his head were in a vise and turning neither right nor left. When a wheel jolted he did not nod, and at no point was he seen to spit or to wipe or rub his face or nose or to move his hand.

—Ammianus Marcellinus
Roman History, XVI.10

I watched 715 go over the fence while sitting back in the left-field corner. I had taken a quick look to either side—at the rows of faces in perfect profile, poised in expectation, jaws slightly dropped, a gallery leaning slightly forward off their seats in the ashen light of the arcs. Then, almost as one, everybody stood up. I'd never heard a sound like that. My notes show that a seismographic scribble was the best I could do to describe that sustained pitch—absolutely constant, so that after a while it seemed caught inside the head, like a violent hum in the ears.

—George Plimpton
One for the Record, 1974

My wife waked betimes to call up her people to washing, and so to bed again; whom I then hugged, it being cold now in the mornings, and then did la otra cosa con her, which I had not done con ella for these tres meses past, which I do believe is a great matter toward the making her of late so indifferent towards me, and with good reason; but now she had much pleasure, and so to sleep again.

—Samuel Pepys
Diary, August 12, 1667

William (Fishbait) Miller, the House doorkeeper, stomp[ed] down the aisle, calling out in best Southern Baptist voice, "Mister Speaker, the President of the United States." When the doors swung open and everybody in the chamber saw that it was not Richard Nixon walking in, the cheers that went up around me on the floor were merely perfunctory when matched with the feeling of relief, a feeling so intense that it could be felt, almost heard, as it rose from their chests and shoulders to leave them free of Nixon and all the name meant to their careers and their country. Oh, they liked Jerry Ford very much.

—Jimmy Breslin
How the Good Guys Finally Won: Notes from an Impeachment Summer, 1975

Every one has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut and afterward in Massachusetts,—from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the heat of an urn. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this?

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU
Walden or, Life in the Woods, 1854

Being thus arrived in a good harbor and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of heaven, who had brought them. . . from all the perils and miseries thereof, againe to set their feete on the firme and stable earth, their proper elemente.

—WILLIAM BRADFORD
History of Plymouth Plantation, 1630

Perfect, entire happiness—so new and strange to me that I dread day to day and almost hour to hour that it must end. Happiness that teaches one gratitude to God and faith in him, and so enables me to shake off my nervous fear that it cannot last. Happiness that I can dwell upon and luxuriate in freely and unrestrained, because it includes the anticipation of a life no longer cold and selfish and objectless and indolent, but henceforth to be built on joyful self-denial and hearty labor for a worthy end. Happiness that it bewilders me to look upon—that I know I do not even yet fully realize and appreciate—the happiness of loving and being generously loved by a beautiful, high-principled, noble-hearted, frank, affectionate, good girl possessed of everything that refinement and cultivation and taste and intelligence can adorn womanhood withal.

—GEORGE TEMPLETON STRONG
Diary, April 9, 1848

One of them having objected to the "observance of days, and months, and years," Johnson answered, "The Church does not superstitiously observe days, merely as days, but as memorials of important facts. Christmas might be kept as well upon one day of the year as another; but there should be a stated day for commemorating the birth of our Savior, because there is danger that what may be done on any day, will be neglected."

—JAMES BOSWELL
The Life of Samuel Johnson, 1791

Paris, when we finally got there, seemed to our depressed spirits like the veritable capital city of Beginning. Her heart was warm and gay, all right, but there was hysteria in its beat, and the kind of compulsive elation psychiatrists strive to cure. Girls snatched overseas caps and tunic buttons from American soldiers, paying for them in hugs and kisses, and even warmer coin. . . . The Folies Bergères and the Casino de Paris, we found a few nights later, were headquarters of the New Elation, filled with generous ladies of joy, some offering their charms free to drinking, laughing and brawling Americans in what was left of their uniforms. . . . The Americans have never been so loved in France, or anywhere else abroad, as they were in those weeks of merriment and wild abandon.

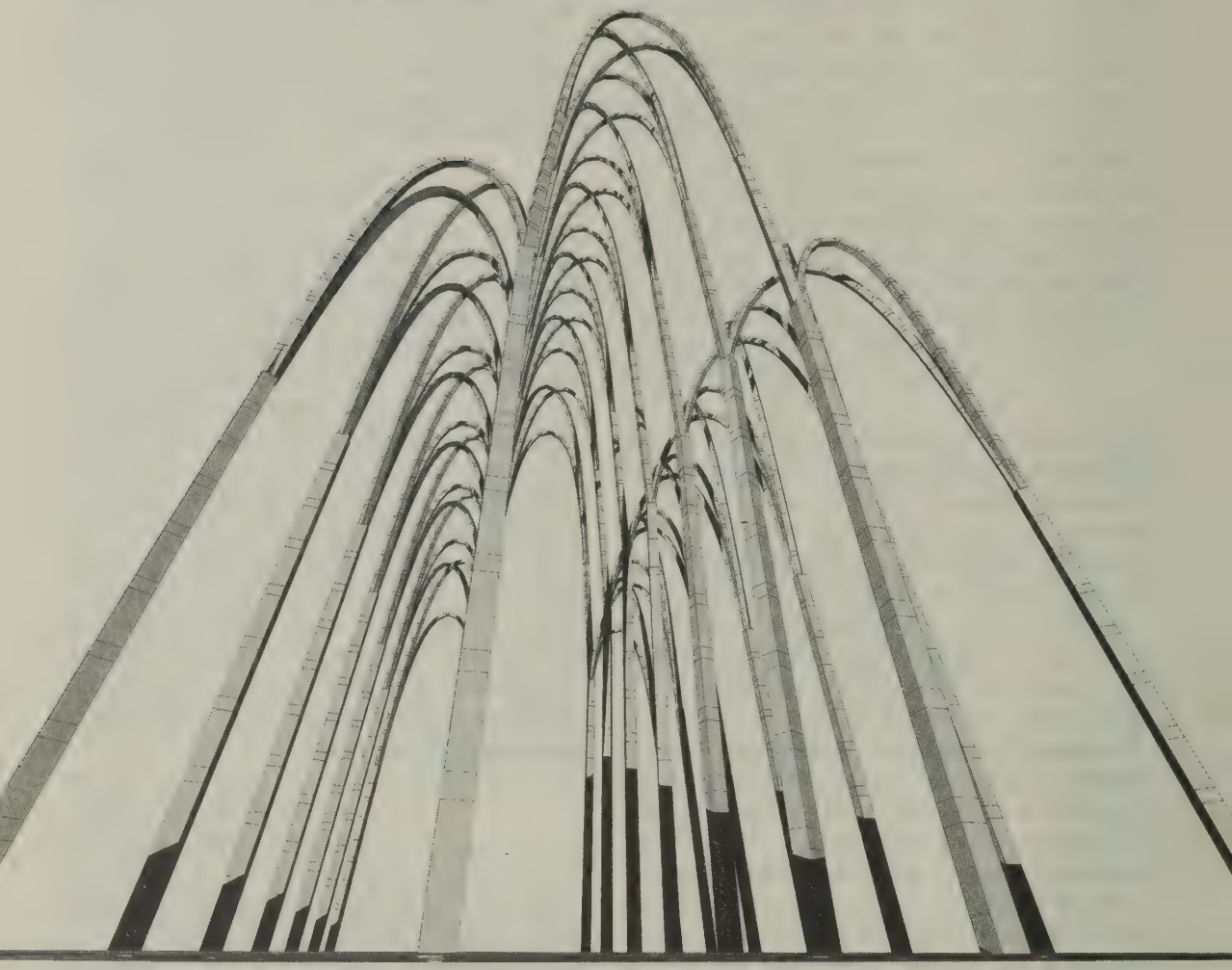
—JAMES THURBER
"The First Time I Saw Paris,"
in *Alarms and Diversions,* 1957

At three in the afternoon a simultaneous "Halt!" rang out from the drivers. They had carefully examined their sledge-meters, and they all showed the full distance—our Pole by reckoning. The goal was reached, the journey ended. I cannot say—though I know it would sound much more effective—that the object of my life was attained. That would be romancing rather too bare-facedly. I had better be honest and admit straight out that I have never known any man to be placed in such a diametrically opposite position to the goal of his desires as I was at that moment. The regions around the North Pole—well, yes, the North Pole itself—had attracted me from childhood, and here I was at the South Pole. Can anything more topsy-turvy be imagined?

—ROALD AMUNDSEN
The South Pole, 1913

Works in Progress

Compiled by Sandra Beasley



SECRETS OF GOTHIC MASONS

The stoneworkers who built Gothic cathedrals didn't record their methods or designs. Eventually their guilds vanished, and with them went many details of cathedral construction. Only the buildings remain.

Today a team of engineers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is using computer software to unlock secrets of such medieval masterpieces as the Cathedral of Saint-Pierre in Beauvais, France. The team examines a stone building by assigning a mass point to each stone block, then linking these points together in a network using software developed to design clothes in video games. The resulting model (above) maps paths of compression that lie within the building, as gravity presses stone upon stone.

"We're applying cutting-edge engineering research to what people were doing in the past," observes John Ochsendorf, the team leader and an MIT professor of architecture. "When you see a tree moving in the wind, you can understand how the wind is flowing and the tree is responding to it. But a cathedral seems to just sit silently. With these tools, we're beginning to understand how the forces [in the stone] are flowing. At some time in the future, we could capture the geometry of a building, maybe with a digital camera, and measure the structural forces working inside it."

The MIT team has joined with computer scientists and art historians from Columbia University who have scanned the structurally troubled Beauvais

AXEL KILIAN (THIS PAGE); ANDREW TALLON (OPPOSITE TOP); DONNA COVENEY/MIT (OPPOSITE BOTTOM)

cathedral with lasers. The new approaches to structural modeling from MIT may help engineers identify structural problems in the building, which was begun in 1225 and partially collapsed in 1284; in 1573 the tower also collapsed. Foreseeing such problems could save historic sites and the works of art they house—not to mention lives.

Ochsendorf (right, showing how a chain mimics the forces in an arch) predicts that more interdisciplinary research teams will arise to use the new technology. "We have engineers and art historians sharing knowledge. There are times we don't understand each other, but we're all moving forward together," he says. "The nature of research is changing." —Elyse Graham

HIGHER POWERS THAT BE

The Founding Fathers thought they had solved the church-state problem by protecting liberty of conscience and prohibiting a national religion. Did they? Noah Feldman, the author of *Divided by God: America's Church-State Problem and What We Should Do About It,* asks 20 questions about the evolving relationship between religion and government. He teaches at the New York University School of Law and is a Carnegie Scholar for 2005–06.

1. The Framers' America was 96 percent Protestant. What does our modern-day religious diversity mean for the United States?

2. Is it fair to say that social or legal norms have made all faiths in America (including Islam, Judaism, and Catholicism) in some sense Protestant?

3. Why has religion remained strong in America while it has declined in Western Europe?

4. Has religion in America remained strong? By what measures is it strong?

5. How should we incorporate "personal spirituality" and the theology of self-help (the Higher Power of the 12-step movement) into our account of American religion?

6. Is our civic religion—the American faith of Lincoln—really a religion?

7. What about secular humanism? Is it a religion?

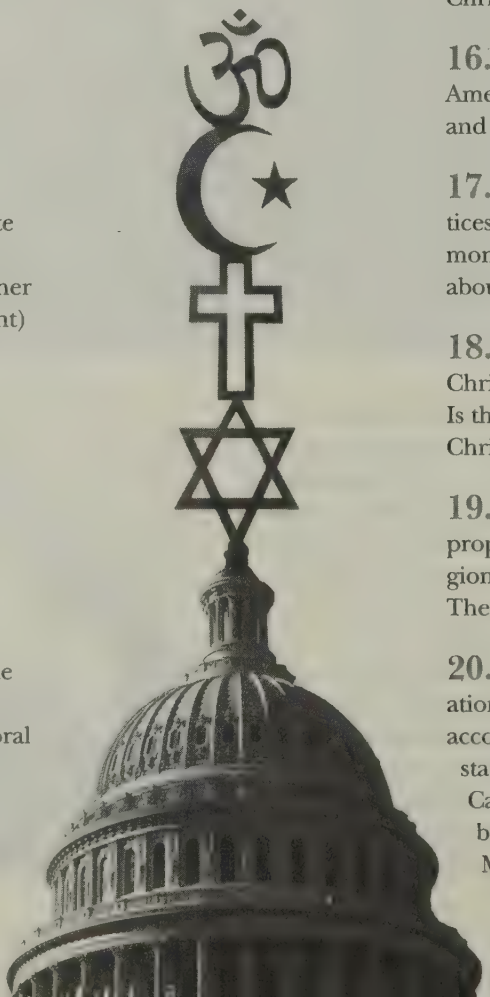
8. Where can religious people in the United States find common ground? In their moral values? In their social policy judgments? In monotheism?

9. In God We Trust: Do we?

10. Does the inclusion of religion in public discourse marginalize or exclude religious minorities or the nonreligious?

11. Does keeping religion out of the public sphere marginalize or exclude religious people?

12. If Evangelical Christians are a powerful political force in the United States, why do they feel embattled?



13. In 1952, in a decision upholding the right of public schools to release students so that they can attend religious instruction, the Supreme Court stated: "We are a religious people." Are we a Judeo-Christian nation?

14. Do we have a Judeo-Christian foreign policy?

15. What the heck is a Judeo-Christian, anyway?

16. Is Islam accepted in America on a par with Judaism and Christianity?

17. If our public religious practices can accommodate monotheism of all types, what about Hinduism and Buddhism?

18. Is there a secularist war on Christmas as a religious holiday? Is there an evangelical war on Christmas as a secular holiday?

19. Who should decide the proper relationship between religion and government? Congress? The courts? Local governments?

20. Should public manifestations of religion be regulated according to nationwide standards? Can the rules in Cambridge, Massachusetts, be different from those in Montgomery, Alabama?

HE GETS YOU, UNDER YOUR SKIN

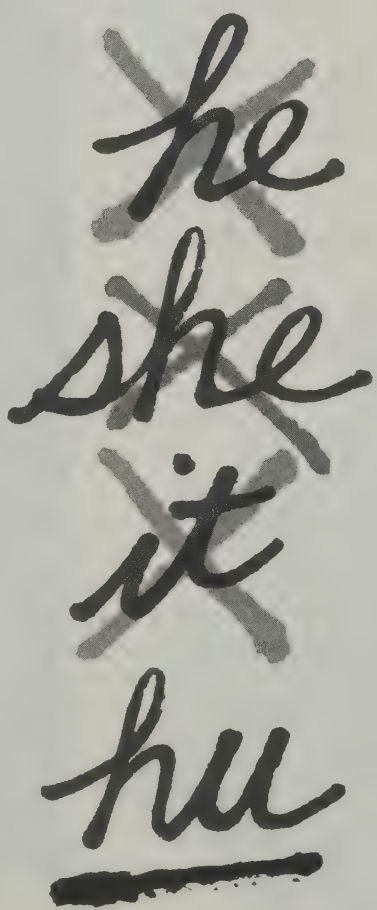
A bioengineer at the University of Pittsburgh has invented a device to give doctors access to a kind of "augmented reality" during operations. Using real-time tomographic reflection, George Stetten's so-called Sonic Flashlight combines the doctor's direct vision with ultrasound images of the inside of a patient's body. During surgery, the physician looks through a partially silvered mirror and is able to see features as deep as six inches under the skin. The surgeon can use the Sonic Flashlight with one hand while the other hand inserts a needle for amniocentesis or local anesthesia, all without having to turn his head to look at an ultrasound monitor.

Stetten's lab at the Carnegie Mellon Robotics Institute has been working on the Sonic Flashlight for more than five years and is now, with a grant from the National Institutes of Health, testing it on human patients. Future applications may include checking trauma victims for internal bleeding or performing brain surgery. —SAM ESQUITH

ONE SMALL STEP FOR HUMANKIND

The convention of using masculine pronouns to describe both genders has long been a thorn in the side of feminists. Grammarians, meanwhile, also are troubled by the lack of an epicene, or gender-neutral, third-person-singular pronoun in modern English. In the absence of an alternative, speakers must resort to the haughty-sounding *one* (as in: The plaintiff should act in one's own best interest) or by forcing *they* to take the singular. Records from as late as 1789 observe the singular *ou* referring to *he, she,* or *it.* Since the death of that term, there's been a string of also-rans, including the 19th-century *thon* and *ze* and the short-lived *s/he* found in certain texts of the 1970s.

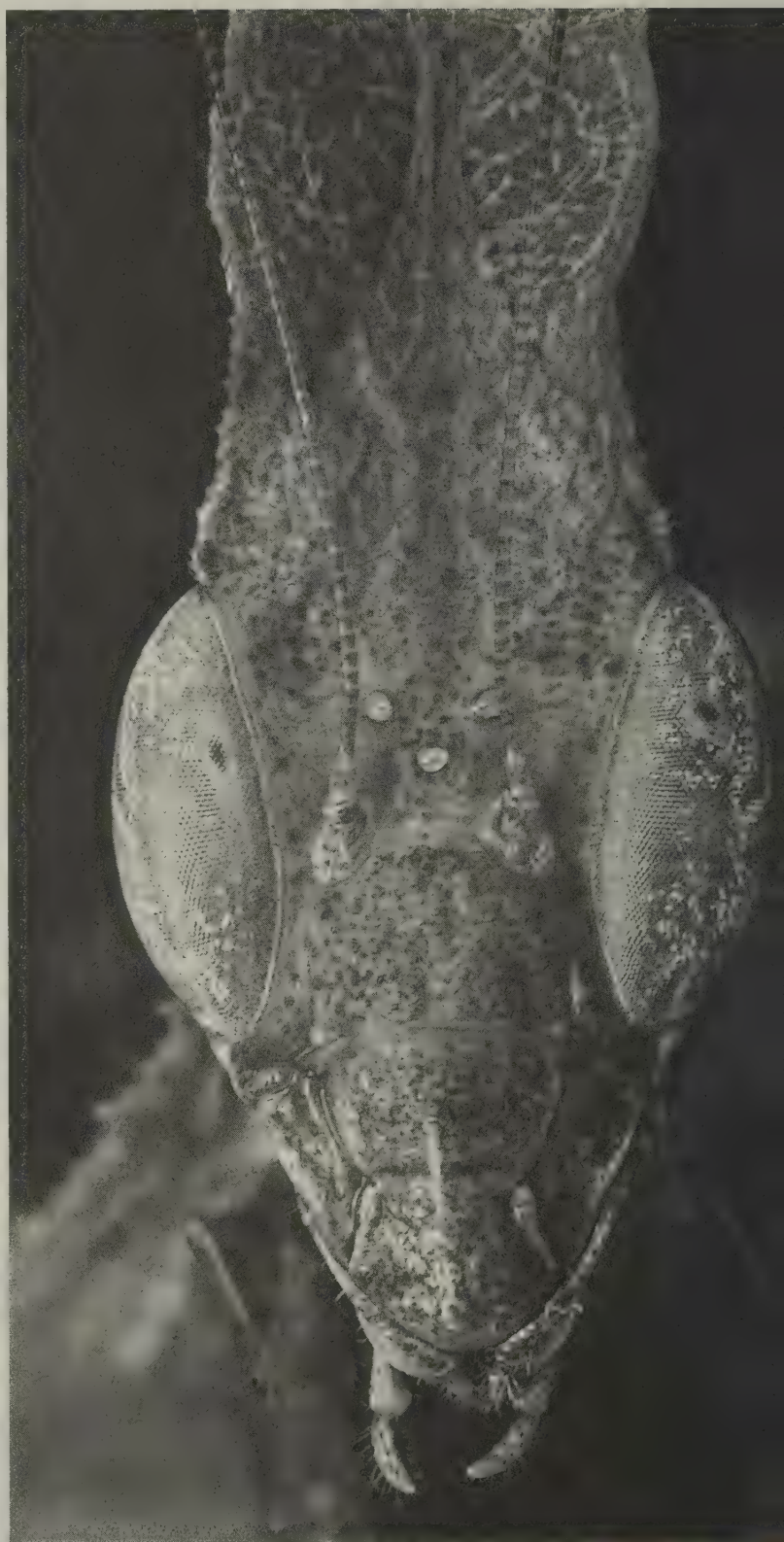
Latest in the succession of options is the "Hopkins hu," pronounced with a short vowel. The term's main proponent is D. N. DeLuna of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. DeLuna is the director of the Archangul Foundation, which was created for the purpose of reforming the English language through intelligent discourse. Her principal inspiration is political historian J. G. A. Pocock, who observed in 1985: "In writing of the authors in the history of political discourse, most of whom were men, I am unembarrassed to find myself using the masculine pronoun, but when it comes to the authors of that history, a host of distinguished names occurs to remind me that it might just as well have been the feminine."



SAY WHAT?

In his laboratory at the University of Maryland, David Yager photographs the sensory structures of insects: the single ear of the praying mantis, for instance, mounted in the center of its underbelly. Experiments confirm that mantises hear only ultrasound, a capability that helps them elude predatory bats. In the infant stage all mantises are deaf, and some females remain so for their life span. A professor of psychology, Yager believes such data on primitive auditory systems can contribute to the understanding of sensory evolution in higher species, including humans.

Yager captures arresting, highly magnified portraits of his subjects (right, the head of an African mantis) by combining several photographs taken at varying focal depths. The composite images exhibit the deep-focus precision of a computer-generated illustration and the accuracy of a photograph, and they confirm theories about otherwise elusive aspects of insect biology. His close-up of a cockroach's eyes was a prizewinner in the National Science Foundation's 2006 Science and Engineering Visualization Challenge. The competition recognizes images that communicate scientific data in a meaningful and accurate way, encouraging public interest and future research.



FIVE DOWN, 995 TO GO

Tom Moon names five country albums to hear before you die.

The Essential Jimmie Rodgers

Time (The Revelator), *Gillian Welch*

The Grand Tour, *George Jones*

Mama Tried, *Merle Haggard*

Coat of Many Colors, *Dolly Parton*

SOUND ADVICE

People have evaluated recordings ever since the day in December 1877 when the Wizard of Menlo Park leaned toward a horn, recited "Mary had a little lamb," and, on a piece of tinfoil, first captured sounds. Thomas Edison's raspy voice will not, however, be included in *1000 Recordings to Hear Before You Die,* a book due out next fall. The author, NPR contributor Tom Moon, explains: "No speeches or historical documents, no comedy records, and no children's music."

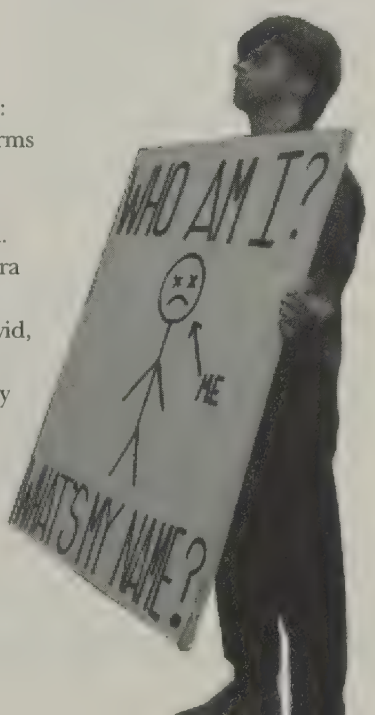
The project is "a mind-gamer paradise," says Moon, whose work has also appeared in *Rolling Stone* and *Blender* magazine. "My basic criterion was 'Is this an essential experience?' In other words, does it define a genre, typify a way of playing or an approach to music? Jimmie Rodgers, the Singing Brakeman (left), who's often identified as a forerunner of modern country, had a yodeling obsession. He wrote songs that talk about his experiences, and even though the yodels are a zillion miles away from life on the Internet, that yodel reaches out and makes the experiences timeless."

Popularity occasionally enters Moon's deliberations, which explains why Michael Jackson's *Thriller* will make the cut. "Once upon a time, Jackson made great music," he explains. "In other cases, I went for less-popular titles from hugely popular artists because some of those neglected ones tell us more about the artist—or the times, or the evolution of the genre."

HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU

A tall man raises a homemade placard that asks "Who am I?" to a surveillance camera on a New York City subway platform. His message: you are being watched. He is one of an anonymous troupe that performs brief, silent skits from original texts and unauthorized adaptations of works by George Orwell, Samuel Beckett, and Edgar Allan Poe, all commenting on the lack of privacy in a modern and monitored world.

When they first began performing in 1996, the Surveillance Camera Players focused on the audience of police officers and guards who watched the camera footage. Now, they engage passersby with their vivid, often humorous street performances. The Players post philosophical statements and sample scripts at www.notbored.org/the-scp.html. They also lead free walking tours and point out the surveillance cameras in such areas of New York City as Times Square, Greenwich Village, and Chinatown. Their book, *We Know You Are Watching: Surveillance Camera Players, 1996–2006,* was published in October, and they are at work on a play to celebrate Human Rights Day and the group's 10th anniversary; it will debut this December.



MUSEUM (TOP); COURTESY OF BILL BROWN (BOTTOM)

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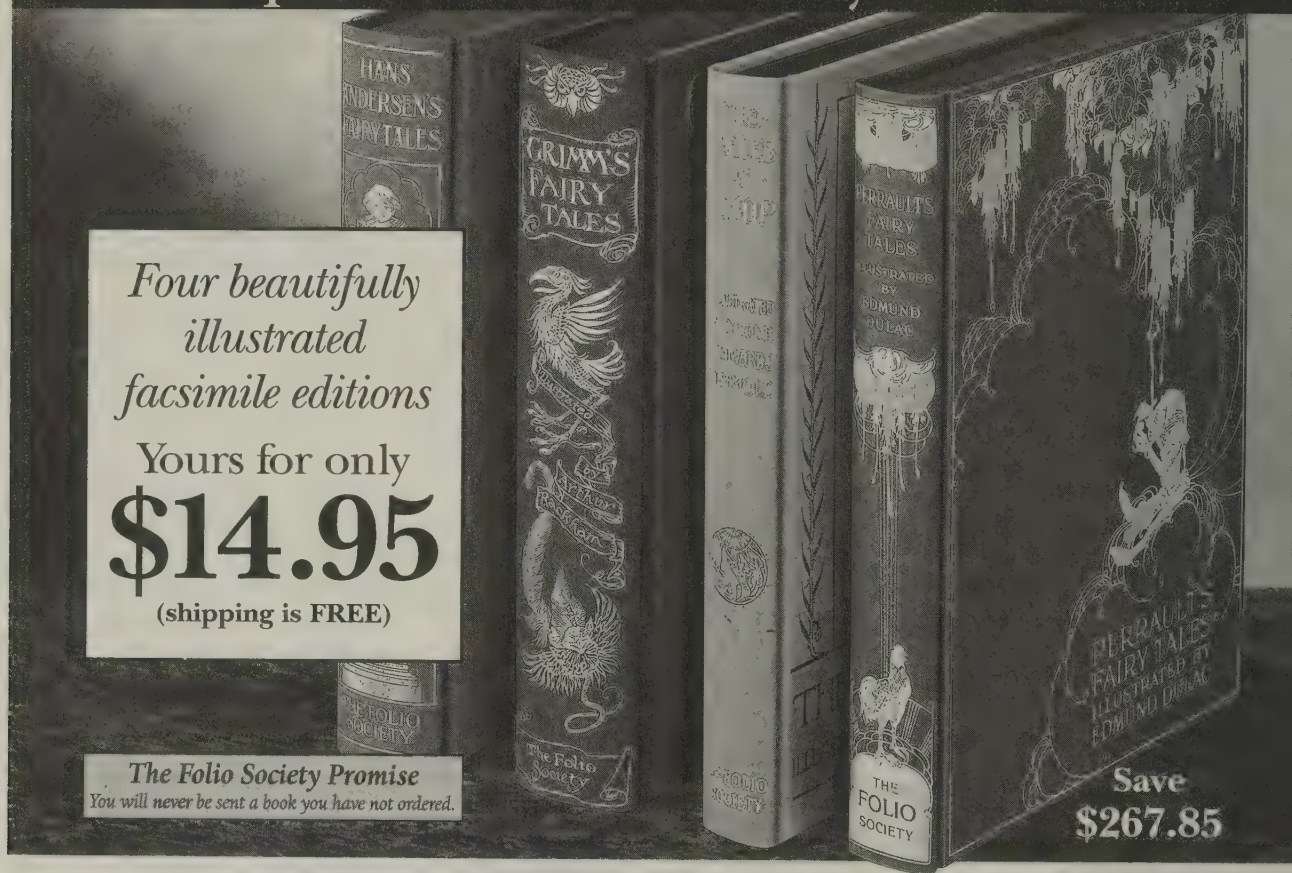

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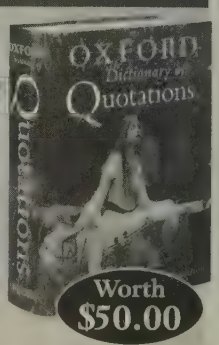

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THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

75TH ANNIVERSARY • 1932–2007

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An Educated Guess

Who knew that mixing the intelligent and the idiosyncratic would yield a long life for a certain small quarterly?

TED WIDMER

I greet you on the re-commencement of our literary year.
Our anniversary is one of hope, and, perhaps, not enough of labor.
Emerson, "The American Scholar"

PROLEGOMENON

"Prologue" seems too ordinary a word for a magazine as weighty as THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, even weightier on the occasion of its 75th anniversary.

The long history of magazines in the United States stretches back to February 13, 1741, when the well-named *American Magazine* was launched at Philadelphia, three days before Benjamin Franklin, uncharacteristically late, came out with our second-oldest, his *General Magazine.* Since then, thousands of new periodicals have been launched with great aplomb, on topics ranging from dog-grooming to philately to celebrity hairdos. Also since then, the same thousands, give or take a few, have fallen right back to earth (aplomb, or "perpendicularity," comes from the French word for lead).

It would have been hard to find a worse moment to launch a new magazine than January 1932, at the height of the Great Depression. Yet that was the exact moment when the first issues of a new quarterly, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, began to roll off the Scribner presses. Nor would it be a simple

Ted Widmer directs the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University. He is a contributing editor of the THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

matter to find a topic less likely to inspire enthusiasm than the one chosen at precisely that moment by the backers of the new venture. The magazine was designed to serve six grand objectives:

- The promotion in America of liberal scholarship.
- Medium for scholars and all persons who are interested in intellectual pursuits, higher learning, and the cultural development of America.
- A synthesis of the arts and sciences essential to liberal education and a guiding philosophy of life.
- An *esprit de corps* among the educated.
- The scholar's responsibility for major social tendencies.
- A whole diet for the whole mind.

Could anything be more boring?

Yet here we are, 75 years after the fact, blinking our eyes in amazement at the survival of an infant who sprang to life with so many more exciting arrivals of 1932: FDR, the New Deal, and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* to name a few.

How did this miracle happen? Frankly, it defies logic, common sense, and everything else the readership values. But the SCHOLAR has been blessed with good friends throughout its existence and with strong and gifted people at the helm. There have been five editors and two interim editors: William A. Shimer (1932–43), Marjorie Hope Nicholson (1943–44), Hiram Haydn (1944–73), Peter Gay (1974), Joseph Epstein (1974–98), Anne Fadiman (1998–2004), Robert Wilson (2004–present). At the request of editor number seven, I read the entire run of the magazine, in order to submit the following report, divided into three 25-year slices. It took up more than 11 feet of space, sandwiched between *American Scandinavian Review* and *American Swedish Weekly* in the Brown University Library. In so doing, I have tried to live up to one of Emerson's more obscure pronouncements: "Take the book, my friend, and read your eyes out."

CHAPTER ONE (1932–1957)

I accept the topic which not only usage, but the nature of our association, seem to prescribe to this day,—the AMERICAN SCHOLAR.
Emerson, "The American Scholar"

The first 25 years defined the magazine forever. DNA is already in place at conception, and the SCHOLAR was defined well before the first copy was issued. That DNA still shapes it today. The 21st-century AMERICAN SCHOLAR might startle the founders in small ways, but they would recognize it as kin.

When the magazine reached 10 years in 1942—an unimaginable mile-

stone in 1932—the editors remembered their early deliberations with all of the zeal of James Madison consulting his journal of the Constitutional Convention to establish Original Intent. In one of the very rare uses of photography in the magazine in its first 73 years, the original "Editors and Advisers" were shown in all of their glory, like tiny baseball cards, with small essays on each person who helped usher the publication into existence. It was perhaps too hopeful to suggest, as the 1942 SCHOLAR did, that "the verbatim record of their witty and incisive discussion of times and tendencies, past and future, and of policies, subjects and authors will some day bring joy to more than one biographer and historian"—although the sentence becomes true if the words "more than" are replaced with "exactly."

The primordial issue (vol. 1, no. 1) was a more academic publication than its descendants. A green cover with black type announced "The American Scholar" without fanfare. The paper was of good quality; the size (7 x 10 inches) eminently decent, the number of pages (128) respectable without appearing presumptuous. Like a smaller, antediluvian *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the early SCHOLAR offered shoptalk for people employed at the nation's universities and colleges. Instead of asking if God was dead, a piece posed the question: "Is God Emeritus?"

That and other clues left no doubt that this was the house organ of a parent organization, the Phi Beta Kappa Society, founded in 1776 (one gets the impression that ΦBK considered the Declaration of Independence the second most important event of that year). The faint jangling of keys was audible throughout the magazine, from the large ΦBK logo on the first page to the back page, with its ad for the L. G. Balfour Company of Attleboro, Massachusetts, "Sole Official Jewelers to ΦBK," purveyors of high school rings and assorted academic trinkets. A rather pedantic classification scheme identified contributors as either ΦBK or not, like an entomologist separating drones from worker bees. Of 17 articles in the first

issue, 14 were either by or about ΦBK members, a whopping 82 percent! On a list of recent titles of interest, a book about Teddy Roosevelt was filed under "Theodore Roosevelt, Biography of (ΦBK Harvard 1880)."

But despite some pedantry, some snobbery, and some Babbittry, there was a spark in these early pages that augured well for the future. It took vision and a small dose of lunacy to build anything in the 1930s, and the magazine's founders—like those who built Rockefeller Center between 1929 and 1934—were no shrinking violets. They were men and women of ambition looking to start something better than the magazine trash they all sifted through on a regular basis. Deeply connected, they came from *The New York Times,* major publishing houses, Columbia University and other schools, and from a centrist tradition engaged with the intellectual issues of the times but committed neither to the overthrow of the standing order nor to the knee-jerk preservation of it.

The name, too, suggests something more than the academic run-of-the-mill: a stab at Emersonian vitality, a willingness to direct thought into new channels. Of course, it was also an insider's nudge, because Emerson gave his famous speech of that name before a Phi Beta Kappa Society in 1837. Emerson's ghost, still very much alive in 1932 (the issue opened with a handsome woodcut of the Sage of Concord), represented exactly the paradox of the SCHOLAR in these early years. It was striving earnestly after something new, and finding it on occasion, but it often defined excellence through the New England worldview that Emerson had tried to distance himself from, and it treated Emerson and his ilk with a filiopietism that they would have scoffed at. One of the early contributors, John Dewey, was 73 years old in 1932—old enough to have known Emerson. In these tentative first years, the old and the new commingled. A bold article on the need to try new economic systems might be followed by a forbidding print of Lucretia Mott (vol. 2, no. 1) almost designed to scare away readers. A hotheaded attack on inequity would inevitably be cooled down by an essay on "Man's Value and Destiny: Moral Atheism in Spinoza." In the spring of 1934, the SCHOLAR had not one but *three* articles on Grover Cleveland! You have to love their confidence.

If there was a signature theme for the magazine in these years, it was intellectual freedom, broadly defined to include both unfair dismissals at U.S. universities and the chilling rise of anti-intellectualism around the world. There were some protests against anti-Semitism and aggressive attacks on the Nazis from a young Reinhold Niebuhr, who wrote with a more electric prose style than the average SCHOLAR contributor. But there was little on the Spanish civil war, Japanese aggression, Mussolini, or Stalin. It is, of course, unfair to read the past with perfect hindsight and wonder why intelligent men and women could not see the future more clearly. There were occasional alarms about other types of apocalypse—the impending socialist revolution; a coming clash of civilizations with the Islamic world (written in 1935, about six decades

Drawn especially for THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR Courtesy of the Disney Studios

MICKEY GETS PLACES

before those phrases echoed down the hallways of Beltway think tanks). But outside of Niebuhr, it would be hard to find a vivid sense of the conflagration that was actually about to happen.

The SCHOLAR was also obtuse about the wider culture it sprang from. It was nowhere near as interested in bottom feeding as, say, H. L. Mencken's *American Mercury*. When one ponders the hurricane force of American culture 70 years ago, one thinks instantly of Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Robert Johnson, Gene Krupa, Walt Disney, Bette Davis, Jimmy Cagney, Orson Welles, S. J. Perelman, the Marx Brothers, Nathanael West, and dozens of their contemporaries. All were invisible in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. Mickey Mouse, though, made one appearance (1939), in what must have seemed a hilarious joke to the readership, holding a Phi Beta Kappa key.

The magazine's music coverage was worse, if possible. In an attempt at trendiness, the editors asked Aaron Copland to assemble a list of must-have phonograph records. He came up with an unimaginative compilation of mostly classical works (he allowed one Gershwin).

In short, the SCHOLAR, like all periodicals of its time, was deeply Caucasian. Sometimes this was merely the ignorance with which Americans of that time interpreted our African heritage. Sometimes it was worse than ignorance. A piece called "Native Elements in American Music" painfully explained that Stephen Foster's music "may have been written to describe a shiftless type of Negro" and identified jazz as "a Jewish interpretation of the Negro."

There was always something a little cautious about the magazine, perhaps because of its sponsorship, or the moderation of its editors, or simply because circulation was precarious and the readership found moderation comfortable. But once in a while the magazine rose above its safe instincts and said something profound about race in America, or poverty, or the other hard issues that bedeviled us then as now. The anthro-

pologist Melville Herskovits wrote a powerful piece in 1939 calling for better research into Black America's origins. W. E. B. Du Bois contributed a moving essay on African-American science later the same year.

If the SCHOLAR was static in some ways, it was positively electrifying in others. I'm talking about color again, but this time I mean the color of the magazine. For reasons I still cannot fathom, the SCHOLAR experimented with a number of bright pastels in its first 25 years. As in extremely bright. In the winter of 1935, in what we remember as a deeply black-and-white period of our history, the SCHOLAR debuted an incandescent orange-red cover, quite attractive even in its faded condition. Later years would offer lime green, robin's egg blue, and other variants.

Another strong point for the SCHOLAR was its willingness to go far afield of what ordinary publications would cover. The flip side of its occasional obliviousness to news was the SCHOLAR's deep interest in non-news—an anti-trendiness that has paradoxically enlivened the magazine throughout its history. In the early years, after the ΦBK spell had worn off, one might encounter an essay on medicines that come from toads, or the history of Russian America, or "The Evolution of Eyes" by a Duluth ophthalmologist. Sometimes it was simply a detail inside a story that would jump out. A story on the University of Padua mentioned a small, ivorylike item on display in an old corridor, with a sign attached: "I am the fifth vertebra of Galileo Galilei: I helped his neck to bend." Emerson, a legendary sentence writer, would have appreciated that one.

When World War II finally broke out, the SCHOLAR took it with its usual equanimity. Inside the old issues, it is sometimes hard to tell that a disruption has occurred. In the summer of 1944, as Allied troops raced across France, the lead story was "On the Talk of Samuel Johnson and His Friends." But the magazine did take the important step of urging Americans to maintain democratic standards while treating aliens inside our borders.

The SCHOLAR's 10th anniversary occurred at a moment nearly as inopportune as its founding—1942, in some of the darkest moments of the war, when few Americans were feeling particularly Emersonian. But this may have been the most enthusiastically celebrated anniversary in the magazine's history. Although the editors confessed that there were only 6,000 subscribers,

W. E. B. DU BOIS, FROM THE NAACP RECORDS, THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

they wrote with pride of their survival against long odds and their high hopes for the future; they wrote of reducing the academic focus of the early years and called instead for "a middle way between lightness and learning."

The magazine did not change its appearance much in 1945, the year the United States found itself in the surprising position of global preeminence. But the gray moral tones of the postwar universe suited the SCHOLAR nicely. Going back to its origins, the little magazine again rose to defend free speech, and from 1945 to 1955 or so it was an eloquent voice for the intellectual independence that its founders had hoped to articulate. At the height of McCarthyism, in the early 1950s, a number of brave editorials and articles left no doubt about where THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR stood.

The contributing editors during this period were quite exceptional. Genuine cold warriors were suddenly in the magazine's midst, including Sumner Welles, who served on the board of editors and penned a lead article in the Spring 1946 issue on the United Nations. Raphael Lemkin, the coiner of the new word *genocide,* wrote an important definition of his idea in the same issue. Other writers included Paul Robeson, Reinhold Niebuhr, Van Wyck Brooks, Richard Hofstadter, Archibald MacLeish, Alain Locke, to name only a few on a very long and eclectic list. Albert Einstein wrote a completely unreadable piece for the SCHOLAR, "On the 'Cosmologic Problem,'" in 1945. Unfortunately, Mr. Genius made a mistake and had to write the following letter in the next issue, reprinted in its entirety:

> The Remark on page 149 concerning the case of vanishing density (G = o) is based on an error in calculation. In reality the space mentioned is Euclidean and hence no argument in favor of the closedness of space can be deduced from it. Otherwise this oversight does not influence the contents of the paper.

What a cutup!

The SCHOLAR efficiently conveyed the exuberance of those postbellum years—both the existential terror of the nuclear age and the hedonism that offered a weird counterpoint to Armageddon. There were new voices on the scene, new devices to buy, and an unlimited interest in America's history, simply because the United States was finally as important as it had always assumed itself to be.

Americans hungered for geographical knowledge in keeping with their new global responsibilities. They were also discoverng the geography of their own bodies—perhaps the last terra incognita left in the New World. The hottest illustration in the history of the SCHOLAR (an easy category to dominate) was an image of Wonder Woman smashing the chains of prejudice in the Winter 1944–45 issue. Sex exploded like atomic energy in the years following the war, and the Kinsey reports generated much chatter in the heretofore sexless pages of the magazine. A long essay in defense of Kin-

sey in 1948 shocked readers, not only by asserting that "mouth-genital caress" is preferred by some socioeconomic groups over others, but by suggesting it existed at all.

Like every high-water mark, the 1950s also conveyed the sense of a tide that was turning. Dazed by our rerun culture, we remember the decade as a flush time for Americans, but the gauzy filter of nostalgia conceals how difficult a time it could be for academics. Beneath the surface deceptions of tailfins and coonskin hats lay a bewildering new underworld of hostility to teachers, writers, and thinkers. It began, perhaps, with Hiroshima, the most important intellectual achievement of the 20th century. Nothing made the scholar more relevant, or more culpable.

This vulnerability was sensed by a series of politicians who preyed on intellectuals, some of whom had trafficked in Communism in the 1930s, and then as now a soft target for the opportunistic. Richard Nixon, the vice presidential candidate in 1952, scored points when he accused Adlai Stevenson of holding "a Ph.D. from Dean Acheson's cowardly college of Communist containment." Senator Joseph McCarthy's every utterance was laced with cynicism toward the idea of well-trained experts offering studied opinions on the great ideas of the day—the core idea of the SCHOLAR. One of his cruelest pursuits was the auto-da-fé he launched against Professor Owen Lattimore, the renowned China expert.

Another setback came from the failure of Stevenson, the great political champion of the universitariat. Eloquent, witty, and famously eggheaded, Stevenson spoke to the SCHOLAR's readership as no other candidate had. Academics were shocked—shocked!—when Ike trounced Adlai twice in a row, in 1952 and 1956. Afterward, a writer in the SCHOLAR tried to explain away his disappointment with the idiotic comment that "thoughtful people" could feel "quiet satisfaction" that such a good man had run at all, a fact "of more importance than the outcome of the election."

Hofstadter, in one of many incisive pieces he gave to the magazine, cut to the heart of the growing gulf between the intellectual and the public: "When intellectuals touch upon power, they seem to have two primary complaints: the first is that power disregards the counsels of intellect, that intellect is shut off from access to power; the second is that intellect, having drawn too close to power, has been corrupted, has sold out. This is not as funny as it may seem."

Although the SCHOLAR tried in some ways to be au courant with new ideas, there was one phenomenally important invention of the midcentury that the editors not only ignored, but actively resisted—television. In issue after issue, the SCHOLAR team took potshots at the embodiment and cause of their futility, calling for government control of the new poison in their midst. There is no evidence that television ever paid the slightest heed to these urbane and well-written critiques.

These dyspeptic expressions of cultural dissonance point to a fairly obvious problem for THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR as time and the Eisenhower era lurched forward. The Young Turks of the 1930s were 20 years older in the 1950s. It would be hard to ask for a more distinguished group of writers than the ones who had lifted the SCHOLAR to prominence. But by 1956, they had stayed at the table a long time.

Another dignified anniversary was celebrated in 1956, but the tone was muted compared to the 10th, and there was no longer a vivid sense that the magazine's survival constituted a miracle worthy of beatification. The SCHOLAR was now simply a part of the landscape, not quite venerable, but deeply rooted.

CHAPTER TWO (1957–1982)

The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances. He plies the slow, unhonored, and unpaid task of observation.
Emerson, "The American Scholar"

In the 25th anniversary issue, Margaret Mead wrote a piece for THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR in which she turned her cold anthropological eye to America's youth, and found a distressing conformity everywhere she looked. Within a decade, that problem would invert itself, as younger American readers rebelled against an Establishment that, for better or worse, included the SCHOLAR. That's the danger of anthropology—you have to be careful the natives don't turn the binoculars around and stare at *you.*

The late '50s were flush times for the SCHOLAR. The magazine was fat, revenues were high, and readers became used to the slightly discordant sight of full-page ads for Bell Telephone, General Motors, and General Electric. The list of subscribers climbed to 40,000, and contributors and editors

alike were drawn from the nation's intellectual elite. The discourse was on a very high plane and included cold warriors like George Kennan; great historians (Perry Miller, C. Vann Woodward, Richard Hofstadter); sociologists (David Riesman), and all manner of people who defied easy description.

These swirling currents were accelerated by the centrifuge of the Kennedy presidency, which temporarily arrested the intellectual decline of the 1950s and gave something to the academic world that it has never had before or since: sexiness. It may be true that some elites looked down their nose at the new president, who, unlike Teddy Roosevelt, did not make Phi Beta Kappa. But for most academics this was a Golden Age, inspired as much by the president's evident passion for ideas as his youth and charisma. The SCHOLAR panted that the new president "takes printer's ink for breakfast" and exulted that to be "intellectual" was "the latest style in American success."

The three short Kennedy years were busy ones at the SCHOLAR. One issue, in the fall of 1961, was especially exciting. Though a 30th anniversary is not usually very important (nor was 1961, in fact, the 30th), the issue offered an extraordinary range of content under the heading "The Changing American Scene." Much of this issue, in fact, was devoted to Kennedy, with analyses of the new administration, a present-tense kind of orientation that had rarely been felt in the SCHOLAR's pages before. A large section at the back included a who's who of top thinkers reflecting on their favorite books, ranging from Eleanor Roosevelt and W. E. B. Du Bois of the old generations to Gore Vidal and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. of the new. The SCHOLAR was erudite and accessible, incisive and playful at the same time.

What may have been the greatest poem in the long history of the SCHOLAR occurred inadvertently in 1962, in the middle of an essay about the sun by the great astronomer Harlow Shapley:

> What is the sun? Gas.
> How did it come about? Gravitational attraction.
> What is its surface temperature? 10,000°F.
> What is its mass? 2×10^{27} tons.
> What keeps it shining? $E = mc^2$
> What is its ultimate destiny? Extinction.
> Anything we can do about it? No!

But Kennedy's assassination brought a full stop to this whimsy. The assassination was not exactly announced in the magazine—news rarely was—but a poem expressed melancholy, and the issues of 1964 and after feel immensely older. The SCHOLAR had never completely abandoned its original generation—a new piece by George Santayana ran in 1964! Now the magazine's age crept up on it, quickly and mercilessly.

Vietnam was moderately opposed by the SCHOLAR's Reasonable Old Men, but moderate opposition was becoming unfashionable to both sides. Television was more powerful than ever. Worse, new academics were achieving celebrity simply by saying that television was powerful. One of the most confusing articles in the history of the SCHOLAR may have been Marshall McLuhan's rambling attempt to explain his new theories about mass communication; he recommended both LSD and *Finnegans Wake* as vehicles for achieving "a multidimensional and multisensuous character of discovery" (adding in a parenthesis, "Perhaps *Finnegan* would be safer, and also more rewarding").

Like a sinking sailor grabbing at a bowline, the SCHOLAR made a few attempts to right itself. It still had the power to attract new voices: Hannah Arendt, Robert Coles, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Joan Didion all appeared in its pages in the '60s. In 1965, Anthony Burgess began to send brilliant reviews from London. A contest for new writers in 1967 was won by a young Alice Walker.

But each time the SCHOLAR tried to address the generation gap, it merely confirmed it. The Spring 1966 issue featured exhausted pieces on "The Electronic Revolution," including a piece on "Electronic Music and Musical Newness" that failed to mention rock and roll (the SCHOLAR hated it from its appearance). A year later, at the end of the Summer of Love, the Beatles were compared to "the bacchic frenzy of certain ancient Greek youths and maidens." The writer might as well have been an ancient Greek. Some interesting essays here and there compared the New Left to the Old Left. But just when the magazine devoted some resources to the counterculture in a major issue on "Youth 1967: The Challenge of Change," it followed up with a lead story in the next issue on "The Problem of Tax Loopholes."

One of the reasons Richard Nixon was elected in 1968 was because he more or less promised to terminate the 1960s—a promise he fulfilled. One suspects that more than a few of the SCHOLAR's readers were relieved. But the 1970s brought different kinds of tremors, chief among them being Nixon's self-immolation. The magazine spilled some ink over Watergate, but it covered the great issues of intellectual freedom that preceded Watergate—the Pentagon Papers, the bugging of Daniel Ellsberg's psychologist's office, and the enemies list—less than one might have expected.

The magazine was not exactly bad—there were still great essays, year after year. Like an old friend, it kept coming to pay its respects. But it lacked the urgency of the Cold War period, when McCarthy stalked the land spewing venom against intellectuals, and it spent less time with great counterintuitive stories—for example, the story that nearly all p1eriodicals missed, the rise of conservatism inside the carapace of these seemingly liberal years.

When it arrived in 1982, the 50th anniversary was restrained. The lead editorial asked "Has the Future a Future?" It was becoming hard to tell.

Chapter Three (1982–2007)

Life is our dictionary.
Emerson, "The American Scholar"

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR entered the Age of MTV and Big Hair with no disruption or acknowledgment that it was entering a new age—or even that time moves forward. Following the 50th anniversary, the magazine continued down its idiosyncratic path, cultivating erudite and witty essays on things read and thought. Here a bit of Jacques Barzun, there a glimpse of Oscar Handlin, and over in this aisle Alfred Kazin. A new kind of article became increasingly common—the celebration of an eminent intellectual, recently deceased. Industry insiders might have warned against the cultivation of an aging demographic whose subscribing days were numbered.

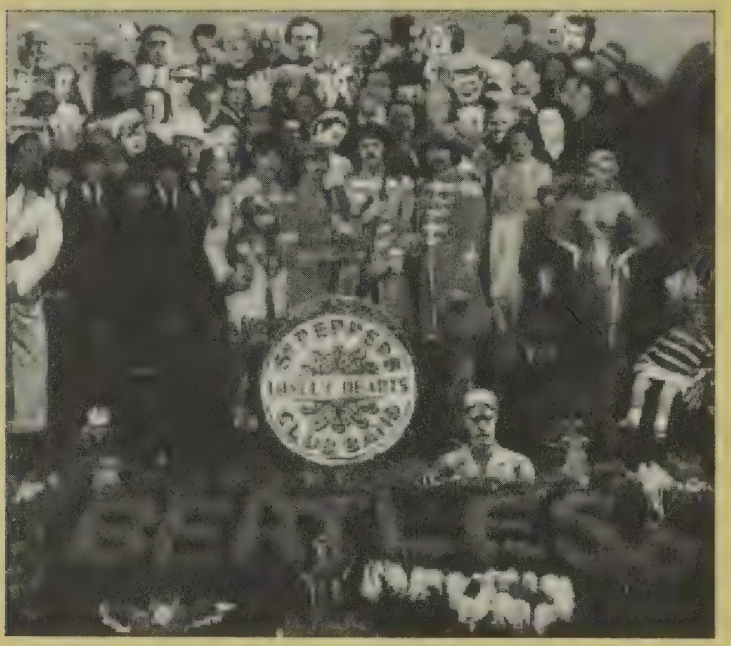
Another tendency—perhaps biological as well—manifested itself in the 1980s. There was a rightward tilt to what had once been a leftward tilting publication—although perhaps leeward is a better word, given that the SCHOLAR has generally avoided the prevailing political winds. Still, there was a pronounced concentration of voices from the emerging world that we now know as neoconservative, among them Gertrude Himmelfarb, Irving Kristol, Bernard Lewis, and Dinesh D'Souza. Many of the writers in the SCHOLAR's stable were never conservative. But as they aged, the old warriors of the '40s and '50s embraced a palpable cultural conservatism. Their crotchety prose jibed well with the SCHOLAR's identity as a high-quality publication above trends. But it surprises, and impresses, to see that an intellectual journal survived the Reagan era while embracing doctrines at odds with what 98 percent of intellectuals think about politics.

Reagan was followed by Bush and then Clinton; the SCHOLAR remained immutable. Clinton was in fact the first president born after the founding of the magazine. But the two were hardly linked; characteristically, the SCHOLAR was completely out of touch with the rest of the American media, and at the end of 1998, it could truthfully claim to be the only magazine in America that had not published the words *Monica Lewinsky*—until that point, that is.

But despite that willful indifference to the temporary, 1998 turned out to be a big year for the magazine. It altered its appearance dramatically, both within and without, when Anne Fadiman inherited the editorial mantle that year. As usual, one has to go to the end of an editor's tenure (to the farewell letter) rather than to its beginning to get at the thinking behind the change, but it's clear that Fadiman wanted to awaken the SCHOLAR and reach new readers—no less crotchety, perhaps, but younger and more varied.

Suddenly, there was a fountain pen hovering over the cover, and graphics—graphics!—improving the appearance of the pieces. And new

contributors were everywhere: Nicholson Baker, Catharine Stimpson, Adam Hochschild, Ellen Ullman, Thomas Mallon, Pico Iyer, Adam Goodheart, Stacy Schiff. In many ways, it was a brave new world—a younger touch, a more tangible female presence, delightfully eccentric pieces that revealed—and reveled in—the inner Victorian weirdness that lurks inside all collectors of information.



But in other ways, this new SCHOLAR was not so out of keeping with the best traditions of the magazine: the pastel colors, and the occasional humor of the old days, and the sense of good friends writing for each other. A new emphasis on keeping journals and gathering odd bits of knowledge also echoed some features from very early issues (which had a different quote on every masthead). Clearly, the new SCHOLAR was more of a writer's place than it had been.

For a historian, it goes against nature to praise living authors, or even to mention them. But it's evident that this was a very good time. The SCHOLAR began going to award ceremonies for magazines and bested publications with much larger circulations. Pieces that appeared in its pages continued to develop into significant books. Current events were fair game—a lovely issue was devoted to writers' reactions to 9/11. And finally, nearly half a century after the first single by Elvis Presley, the SCHOLAR had its first great rock piece when David Michaelis wrote an appreciation of the lyrics from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—now so old an artifact that he was able to present it under the rubric "Rereading."

The careful study of issue after issue of a magazine begins to compress time, and with a magazine of strong internal continuity, as this one surely is, it becomes easy to lose sense of the quotidian. But even for a periodical as joyfully out of it as the SCHOLAR has often been, there is no escaping the truth that everything is temporary in the magazine business. And so the Fadiman era turned out to be. In her final editorial, in the Autumn 2004 issue, she explained that "conflicting managerial styles on the pub-

lishing and editorial sides of the magazine" had led to her dismissal.

A new editor was brought in, one with a deep respect for the publication's history, as well as a desire to follow the Emersonian precedent and shake things up a bit. Those who give awards to magazines still recognize the efforts of the SCHOLAR's staff in the editorial offices off Dupont Circle. And recent issues of the SCHOLAR—including, I hope, the one in your hands—continue to offer an appealing combination of past and present, along with some things that are neither.

OP. CIT.

Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.
Emerson, "The American Scholar"

In 2007, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR turns a surprisingly spry 75 years old. It is read and loved, if not by millions, then by a number that would have shocked the founders—about 32,000 at the last reckoning.

The magazine's strengths are clear. It takes on topics that no one else will go near. It provides young and old with a forum to express highly individual thoughts that have little to do with media obsessions. It offers particular refuge to the essay—a form of writing that goes back past Emerson to Montaigne, the ancestor of skeptics everywhere—and breathes life to this day.

Will there be a 100th anniversary? All indications from the publishing industry suggest that content is declining, paper is vanishing, and erudite sexless commentary is especially suicidal. Sound bites are shrinking, attention spans narrowing, and public language is degraded 24/7, from the vapid ad slogan to the lying speech to the vowelless text message. The ultimate paradox of our instantaneous, borderless world may be that we have achieved a perfect system of communication only to discover that we have nothing to say.

In other words, all of the odds are stacked against the SCHOLAR going into the next 25 years. What a perfect place to be!

Into this next quarter, the little quarterly can go happily, small enough to fly below the enemy radar, building meaning and nuance through close observation, elevating the particular over the general, and insisting that words do have consequences.

Let us close with a bit of scripture. Emerson has lost none of his bite. "Wise men pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things; so that picturesque language is at once a commanding certificate that he who employs it, is a man in alliance with truth and God."

See you at the centennial. ❖

Postcards from the Past

Pressing questions and a persistent vitality

RICHARD E. NICHOLLS

Surprise is the natural companion of research. Like Ted Widmer, I have also recently read through seven decades of the SCHOLAR and along the way made a series of unanticipated discoveries. The first was that, in almost any volume one chooses to open, the stream of voices that comes pouring out—sober or blithe, precise or deeply speculative, angry or meditative—retains a startling freshness and relevance.

The second was the repetition over many decades of certain themes, as different generations of editors and writers returned to several tantalizing, vital questions, including the place and purpose of the academy in society and the nature of a scholar's responsibility to his or her discipline and nation. Every major discipline (from philosophy to religious history, the sciences to the social sciences, the arts to contemporary politics) has been repeatedly addressed. Pressing questions from war to race to the environment are explored from different perspectives. A number of influential essays appeared first in the SCHOLAR, as did urgent reports on discoveries and new theories in the sciences and new concepts in the humanities. Other persistent themes include the nature of scientific investigation, the evolution and uses of the arts, and how the lives of teachers, leaders, or artists can instruct, correct, or cheer us. Over and over, reports on new research in history and the social sciences suggest, sometimes subtly and at other times urgently, how the results of those studies shape our society.

~ Richard E. Nicholls is a contributing editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

Every magazine or journal participates in its age and reflects it. But a particular sense of how one age emerges from another is never far from the best pieces in the SCHOLAR. Also present is the unspoken assumption that intellectuals should be able to speak to concerned lay readers, that such readers compose a substantial audience, and that they are curious about their own and other societies.

One might assume from this that the many voices in the magazine would share a measured tone. But even casual browsing reveals a variousness in prose styles, ranging from the elegiac to the salty, and from the personal to the abstract and meditative. Poetry made repeated appearances over the decades, before becoming a standard element in recent years. Satiric pieces, playing on scholarly preoccupations, have appeared, as have records of travel, reports of new cultural trends, timely and often heated pieces on questions of religious belief, and some shrewd if playful essays on such elements of popular culture as comics, film, and television.

The thousands of contributors to the magazine—the academics, administrators, scientists, writers, critics, artists, and researchers—many now all but forgotten, can be linked by the profound beliefs that ideas matter and that the right expression of them is a necessary part of the thinking life. Perhaps that explains the undiminished energy of so much contained in the several hundred issues of the SCHOLAR. Hard-earned and original knowledge, matched to disciplined expression, has a lasting life that opinion or speculation does not. Taken together, the whole run of the publication is not only a remarkable archive of original thought, but a paradigm of the rational, examined life, one in which no branch of knowledge is alien, each part matters, and every problem is susceptible to reason. To read the magazine carefully is to become part of the community it has quietly, stubbornly tried to identify and sustain.

What follows is a sampling from 75 years.

The belief in man—man as an individual—man as an individual free to think as he pleases and say as he thinks—man as an individual answerable only to his conscience and his God—this belief is not easy to articulate in realistic and self-evident terms in an industrialized society and in such a world as modern physics has revealed to us. And yet, without a new and convincing articulation of belief in the unqualified right of the individual human being to think as he pleases and say what he thinks, regardless of the preconceptions and the creeds, the opinions and the prejudices, of governments or parties or organizations or churches, civilization as we have known it—civilization crowned by science and by art—civilization carried forward by the creative spirit and the inquiring mind—would be unthinkable.

FROM "THE AMERICAN STATE OF MIND"
by Archibald MacLeish, Autumn 1950

The modesty of the true scholar is neither a gesture nor a joke. To him it is quite literally the case that a science of anything presupposes a vast ignorance concerning it: an ignorance, indeed, so vast that even its very nature may never be understood. He as a scientist, in other words, may never become clear as to what it is of which he is ignorant, or ought to consider himself ignorant; he may never learn just what it is that he should seek to know. Meanwhile, however, he has his method; he does know how to proceed within the field of ignorance he has managed to define. . . . So he is always busy, with scarcely the time to pause and tell us, should we ask, how much he knows; and more particularly, how much of what he knows.

FROM "THE KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE"
by Mark Van Doren, Autumn 1955

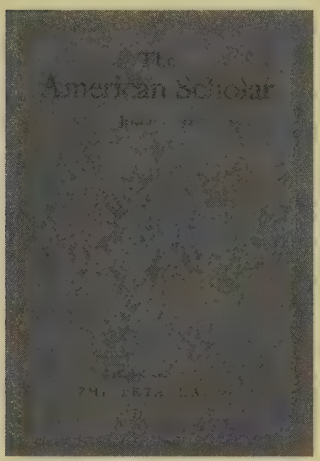
Those who think of the truth as the sum of what we read in the newspapers or may find in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* move sanely enough at one conventional level. Such reports are not ordinarily false. They designate real events, objects truly discoverable on the scale of the human senses; and they trace the relations of these objects and events on the plane of human action. But the form thus assumed by those facts is a mere image. In their aspect and individuality our ideas are signs, not portions, of what exists beyond us; and it is only when experiment and calculation succeed in penetrating beneath the image, that (for instance, in mathematical physics) we may gain some more precise, although still symbolic, notion of the forces that surround us. We and our knowledge are a part of nature: it is therefore inevitable that the rest of nature, in its concreteness, should be external to us. . . . Absolute truth is hidden from us, and the deeper our science goes, the more ghostly it becomes. In entering that temple we have passed out of the sunlight. We are no longer surrounded by living objects, but by images of the gods.

FROM "SPIRIT IN THE SANCTUARY"
by George Santayana, Winter 1963–1964

The long history of man, besides its ennobling features, contains also a disrupting malice which continues into the present. Since the rise of the first neolithic cultures, . . . man has hanged, tortured, burned and impaled his fellow men. He has done so while devoutly professing religions whose founders enjoined the very opposite upon their followers. It is as though we carried with us, from some dark tree in a vanished forest, an insatiable thirst for cruelty. Of all the wounds man's bodily organization has suffered in his achievement of a thinking brain, this wound is the most grievous of all, this shadow of madness, which has haunted every human advance since the dawn of history and which may well precipitate the final episode in the existence of his race.

FROM "PAW MARKS AND BURIED TOWNS"
by Loren Eiseley, Spring 1958

Through the 18th and 19th centuries—from Crèvecoeur's notion that America had produced a new man, through Jefferson's belief in the wealth, promise and magnificence of the continent, and Turner's faith in a frontier-born culture and frontier-nourished institutions—runs the refrain that American values spring from the circumstances of the New World, that these are the secret of the "American Way of



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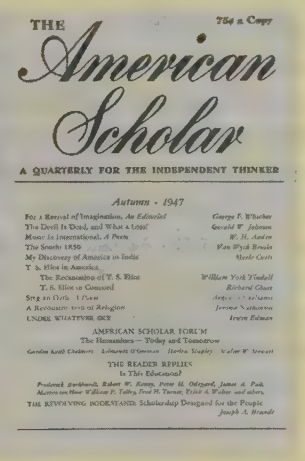

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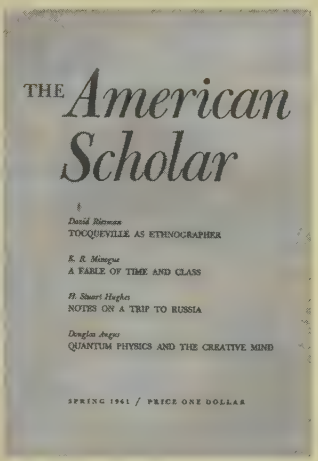

THE American Scholar
David Riesman
TOCQUEVILLE AS ETHNOGRAPHER
E. R. Mingue
A FABLE OF TIME AND CLASS
H. Stuart Hughes
NOTES ON A TRIP TO RUSSIA
Douglas Angus
QUANTUM PHYSICS AND THE CREATIVE MIND
SPRING 1961 / PRICE ONE DOLLAR

—1961—

Life." This has been both an example of our special way of dealing with ideas and an encouragement to it. For lack of a better word, we may call this a leaning toward *implicitness,* a tendency to leave ideas embodied in experience and a belief that the truth somehow arises out of the experience.

This carries with it a preference for the relevance of ideas as against their form and a surprising unconcern for the separability of ideas. We have seldom believed that the validity of an idea was tested by its capacity for being expressed in words. The beliefs that values come out of the context and that truth is part of the matrix of experience (and hardly separable from it) become themselves part of the way of American thinking—hence the formlessness of American thought, its lack of treatises, schools and systems.

FROM "THE PLACE OF THOUGHT IN AMERICAN LIFE"
by Daniel J. Boorstin, Spring 1956

Faith in science is faith in the hope, the fruitfulness and value of the human adventure. It is a faith that action will be, within limits, effective, and that the effects of action will be humanly rewarding. There will be little time or inclination to speculate on the meaninglessness of life, or to allege meaninglessness. Inquiry itself will render so much possible in the way of new discriminations and hitherto unsuspected varieties of goods and value in the world that the world itself will become charged not with one preordained meaning, but with ever-new awarenesses and interests. The habit of inquiry will liberate the spontaneities of imagination. The human

adventure, in science itself, in art, in human relations will be sufficient nourishment for a faith in humanity and its future.

FROM "SCIENCE AND THE DREAM OF HAPPINESS"
by Irwin Edman, Autumn 1946

Whole philosophies have evolved over the question whether the human species is predominantly good or evil. I only know that it is mixed, that you cannot separate good from bad, that wisdom, courage, and benevolence exist alongside knavery, greed, and stupidity; heroism and fortitude alongside vainglory, cruelty, and corruption.

It is a paradox of our time in the West that never have so many people been so relatively well off and never has society been more troubled. Yet I suspect that humanity's virtues have not vanished, although the experiences of our century seem to suggest that they are in abeyance. A century that took shape in the disillusion which followed the enormous effort and hopes of World War I, that saw revolution in Russia congeal into the same tyranny it overthrew, saw a supposedly civilized nation revert under the Nazis into organized and unparalleled savagery, saw the craven appeasement by the democracies, is understandably marked by suspicion of human nature. A literary historian, Van Wyck Brooks, discussing the nineteen-twenties and -thirties, spoke of "an eschatological despair of the world." Whereas Whitman and Emerson, he wrote, "had been impressed by the worth and good sense of the people, writers of the new time" were struck by their lusts, cupidity, and violence, and had come to dislike their fellow men. . . .

We must keep a balance, and I know of no better prescription than a phrase from Condorcet's eulogy on the death of Benjamin Franklin: "He pardoned the present for the sake of the future."

FROM "MANKIND'S BETTER MOMENTS"
by Barbara Tuchman, Autumn 1980

I could scarcely sleep for excitement the night after seeing the periodic table—it seemed to me an incredible achievement to have brought the whole, vast, and seemingly chaotic universe of chemistry to an all-embracing order. . . .To have perceived an *overall* organization, a superarching principle uniting and relating *all* the elements, had a quality of the miraculous, of genius. And this gave me, for the first time, a sense of the transcendent power of the human mind, and the fact that it might be equipped to discover or decipher the deepest secrets of nature, to read the mind of God.

FROM "MENDELEEV'S GARDEN"
by Oliver Sacks, Autumn 2001

One of the mysterious things about newspapers is that the items in them have no connection except the dateline . . . and it is this dateline that enables us to enter the world of the news, as it were, by going through the looking glass. Just as Alice in Won-

derland went through the looking glass, when you enter the world of the telegraph or of the circuit, you really become involved in the information process. When you enter through the dateline, when you enter your newspaper, you begin to put together the news—you are producer.

FROM "ADDRESS AT VISION 65"
by Herbert Marshall McLuhan, Spring 1966

Instead of offering us freedom, the uncontrolled flow of pictures distracts us from the task of determining for ourselves what might be real enough to really matter. We face the prospect of being reduced to the status of consumers who, given a hyperabundance of choices, lack the ability to choose. Those in power benefit from this abandonment of discernment; they get to make the choices for us. Thus the liberty of an unchecked image environment may prove to be less a blessing than a subtle form of tyranny, and the democracy of the camera a perverse kind of fascism.

FROM "POINT AND SHOOT:
HOW THE ABU GHRAIB IMAGES REDEFINE PHOTOGRAPHY"
by Andy Grundberg, Winter 2005

Is the scientific and technological revolution now in progress actually any more sweeping than that which took place more slowly during the 3,000 years since Homer wrote? Is not the difference between the scienceless and machineless world of his time and that which the 20th century now possesses and cowers under as great as any that is likely to be between our present world and that of the 21st century? The heroes of the *Iliad* would be as bewildered in New York or San Francisco as we would be distressed by Troy, Ithaca or Mycenae. But if we could meet together in some grove or porch where nothing need remind us of the presence or absence of those changes that time has made in our environment, and if we were to discuss not religion, technology or science, but love, hate, tragedy, pathos, and the paradox of man's persisting inhumanity despite his capacity for pity and tenderness, then I think we would understand one another quite well and realize that . . . we are not new men but the same old paradoxical creatures, "the glory, jest and riddle of the world."

FROM "IF YOU DON'T MIND MY SAYING SO"
a column by Joseph Wood Krutch, Autumn 1966

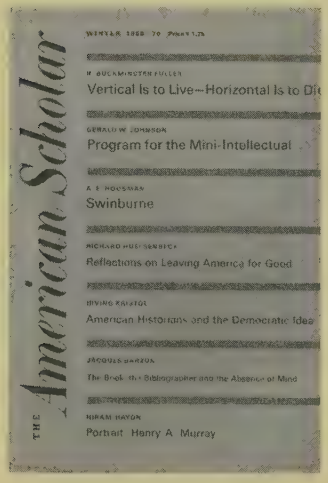
Nothing comes harder than original thought. Even the most gifted scientist spends only a tiny fraction of his waking hours doing it. . . . The rest of the time his mind hugs the coast of the known, reworking old information, adding lesser data, giving reluctant attention to the ideas of others . . . , warming lazily to the memory of successful experiments, and looking for a problem—always looking for a problem, something that can be accomplished, that will lead somewhere, anywhere.

There is, in addition, an optimal degree of novelty in problem seeking, one that

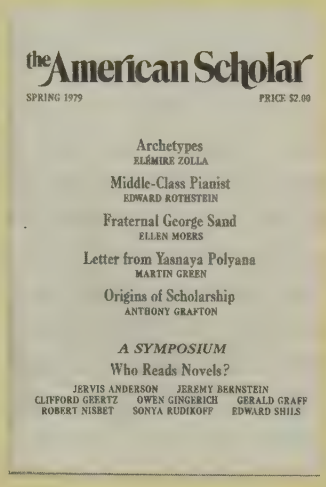
is difficult to measure and follow. Stick to the coast too tightly and only minor new data will follow. Venture out of sight and you risk getting lost at sea. Years of effort might then be wasted, competitors will hint that the enterprise is pseudo-science, grants and other patronage will be cut off, and tenure and election to the academies denied. The fate of the overly daring is to sail off the rim of the world.

FROM "THE DRIVE TO DISCOVERY"
by Edward O. Wilson, Autumn 1984

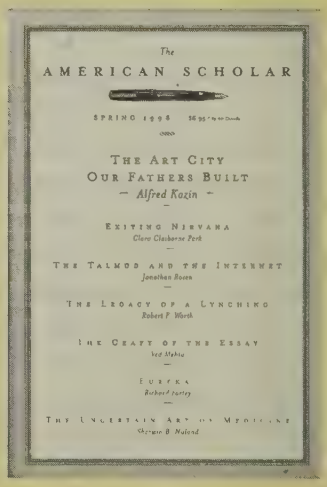
A challenge is being mounted to some of the central assumptions of mainstream social science. The strict separation of theory and data, the "brute fact" idea; the effort to create a formal vocabulary of analysis purged of all subjective reference, the "ideal language" idea; and the claim to moral neutrality and the Olympian view, the "God's truth" idea—none of these can prosper when explanation comes to be regarded as a matter of connecting action to its sense rather than behavior to its determinants. The refiguration of social theory represents, or will if it continues, a sea change in


THE American Scholar
Vertical Is to Live—Horizontal Is to Die
Program for the Mini-Intellectual
Swinburne
Reflections on Leaving America for Good
American Historians and the Democratic Idea
Portrait: Henry A. Murray

—1969—



—1979—



—1998—

our notion not so much of what knowledge is, but of what it is we want to know. Social events do have causes and social institutions effects; but it just may be that the road to discovering what we assert in asserting this lies less through postulating forces and measuring them than through noting expressions and inspecting them.

The turn taken by an important segment of social scientists, from physical process analogies to symbolic form ones, has introduced a fundamental debate into the social science community concerning not just its methods but its aims. It is a debate that grows daily in intensity. The golden age (or perhaps it was only the brass) of the social sciences when, whatever the differences in theoretical positions and empirical claims, the basic goal of the enterprise was universally agreed upon—to find out the dynamics of collective life and alter them in desired directions—has clearly passed.

FROM "BLURRED GENRES: THE REFIGURATION OF SOCIAL THOUGHT"
by Clifford Geertz, Spring 1980

Mercurial ribbon licking the cut lip of the Blue Ridge—
daybreak
or end, I can't tell
as long as I ignore the body's marching orders, as long as
I am alive in air . . .

FROM "LOOKING UP FROM THE PAGE,
I AM REMINDED OF THIS MORTAL COIL"
by Rita Dove, Spring 2004

Science has been uncommonly successful as a strategy to command the future because it admits no distinction between ends and means. There are no higher ends in science than truthful knowledge, and there are no other means allowed on the way than truthful knowledge. In an age in which ideologies claim, not so much arrogantly as insolently, that they are justified in using men as means, this central value in the ethic of science has a right to be put at the center of the Reformation.

FROM "TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE IN EVOLUTION"
by J. Bronowski, Spring 1972

The scientist himself does not want to go to the moon; he knows that for his purposes unmanned spaceships carrying the best instruments human ingenuity can invent will do the job of exploring the moon's surface much better than dozens of astronauts. And yet, an actual change of the human world, the conquest of space or whatever we may wish to call it, is achieved only when manned space carriers are shot into the universe, so that man himself can go where up to now only human imagination and its power of abstraction, or human ingenuity and its power of fabrication, could reach.

FROM "MAN'S CONQUEST OF SPACE"
by Hannah Arendt, Autumn 1963

From the records of history it seems to be clear that the theologies and philosophies which take time too seriously are correlated with political theories that inculcate and justify the use of large-scale violence. . . . For those whose philosophy does not compel them to take time with an excessive seriousness, the ultimate goal is to be sought neither in the revolutionary's progressive social apocalypse, nor in the reactionary's revived and perpetuated past, but in an eternal divine Now, which those who sufficiently desire this good can realize as a fact of immediate experience. The mere act of dying is not in itself a passport to eternity; nor can wholesale killing do anything to bring deliverance either to the slayers, or the slain, or their posterity. The peace that passes all understanding is the fruit of the liberation into eternity.

FROM "ETERNITY AND TIME"
by Aldous Huxley, Summer 1945

Our democracy has overripened to the point where our politicians poll us before they speak their minds, which creates no leaps of inspiration, but instead a circle of confusion. Agility isn't buoyancy, doesn't make us happy. This reliance on the common wisdom puts the cart before the horse because of course the theory was not that the people might somehow formulate enlightened national policies—rather that collectively, intuitively, they could best fathom who ought to be entrusted to do so.

FROM "THE GLUE IS GONE"
by Edward Hoagland, Winter 2005

The uncontrollable brute whom I want to put out of the way is not to be punished for his misdeeds, nor used as an example or a warning; he is to be killed for the protection of others, like the wolf that escaped not long ago in a Connecticut suburb. No anger, vindictiveness or moral conceit need preside over the removal of such dangers. But a man's inability to control his violent impulses or to imagine the fatal consequences of his acts should be a presumptive reason for his elimination from society.

FROM "IN FAVOR OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT"
by Jacques Barzun, Spring 1962

René Descartes
Murmured: "For my part,
If I cogitate, it must be clear
That I am here."

Robert Frost
Turned and tossed.
His nightmare was, What to do
If the road branched into more than two?

Henry Fielding
Was unyielding
On some points of English diction.
What a terrible affliction!

FROM "CLERIHEWS FOR THE CLERISY"
by Jacques Barzun writing as Roger du Béarn, Summer 1992 and Summer 1996

A few months ago I read an interview with a critic; a well-known critic; an unusually humane and intelligent critic. The interviewer had just said that the critic "sounded like a happy man," and the interview was drawing to a close; the critic said, ending it all: "I read, but I don't get time to read at whim. All the reading I do is in order to write or teach, and I resent it. We have no TV, and I don't listen

to the radio or records, or go to art galleries or the theater. I'm a completely negative personality."

As I thought of this busy, artless life—no records, no paintings, no plays, no books except those you lecture on or write articles about—I was so depressed that I went back over the interview looking for some bright spot, and I found it, one beautiful sentence: for a moment I had left the gray, dutiful world of the professional critic, and was back in the sunlight and shadow, the unconsidered joys, the unreasoned sorrows, of ordinary readers and writers, amateurishly reading and writing "at whim." The critic said that once a year he read *Kim;* and he read *Kim*, it was plain, at whim: not to teach, not to criticize, just for love—he read it, as Kipling wrote it, just because he liked to, wanted to, couldn't help himself. To him it wasn't a means to a lecture or an article, it was an end; he read it not for anything he could get out of it, but for itself. And isn't this what the work of art demands of us? The work of art, Rilke said, says to us always: *You must change your life.* It demands of us that we too see things as ends, not as means—that we too know them and love them for their own sake. This change is beyond us, perhaps, during the active, greedy and powerful hours of our lives; but during the contemplative and sympathetic hours of our reading, our listening, our looking, it is surely within our power, if we choose to make it so, if we choose to let one part of our nature follow its natural desires. So I say to you, for a closing sentence: *Read at whim! read at whim!*

FROM "POETS, CRITICS AND READERS"
by Randall Jarrell, Summer 1959

A poem is not the same poem from reading to reading, because the reader is not the same reader.

FROM "COMPRESSION WOOD"
by Franklin Burroughs, Spring 1998

The rise of mass communications, the growth of large organizations and novel technologies, the invention of advertising and public relations, the professionalization of education—all contributed to linguistic pollution, upsetting the ecological balance between words and their environment. In our own time the purity of language is under unrelenting attack from every side—from professors as well as from politicians, from newspapermen as well as from advertising men, from men of the cloth as well as from men of the sword, and not least from those indulgent compilers of modern dictionaries who propound the suicidal thesis that all usages are equal and all correct.

A living language can never be stabilized, but a serious language can never cut words altogether adrift from meanings. The alchemy that changes words into their opposites has never had more adept practitioners than it has today. We used to object when the Communists described dictatorships as "people's democracies" or North Korean aggression as the act of a "peace-loving" nation. But we are no slouches ourselves in the art of verbal metamorphosis. There was often not much that was "free"

about many of the states that made up what we used to call, sometimes with capital letters, the Free World. . . . Social fluidity, moral pretension, political demagoguery, corporate and academic bureaucratization and a false conception of democracy are leading us into semantic chaos. We owe to Vietnam and Watergate a belated recognition of the fact that we are in linguistic as well as political crisis and that the two may be organically connected. As Emerson said, "We infer the spirit of the nation in great measure from the language."

FROM "POLITICS AND THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE"
by Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Autumn 1974

Why do expatriates yearn for home? For they do yearn for it. The paradigm is those thousands of Englishmen in colonial India who dreamed their whole lives of a rose-covered cottage in Surrey. Is it a sentimental attachment to family and clan? Patriotism, after all? Are we all, in the end, involuntary exiles? Surely we voluntary ones long for home in another way. We *chose* to go. We are where we want to be. Is our homesickness a theatrical pose, just another facet of our disponibility? . . .

Beyond freedom there is a secret nostalgia for boundaries, a reverence for old habits and habitats. Colored by the sadness of lost youth, home becomes a beacon, the single place where you always belonged, the envelope of generations, the parents and the children who shared this place, this house, this neighborhood. Under their savoir vivre, expatriates wistfully think about immortality and know that they will not have it in foreign parts.

FROM "ROOTLESS"
by Dorothy Backer, Spring 1987

The superrich make lousy neighbors—
they buy a house and tear it down
and build another, twice as big, and leave.
They're never there; they own so many
other houses, each demands a visit.
Entire neighborhoods called fashionable,
bustling with servants and masters, such as
Louisburg Square in Boston or Bel Air in L.A.,
are districts now like Wall Street after dark
or Tombstone once the silver boom went bust.
The essence of the superrich is absence.
They're always demonstrating they can afford
to be somewhere else. Don't let them in.
Their money is a kind of poverty.

"SLUM LORDS"
by John Updike, Autumn 1998

I nap well on airplanes, trains, buses, and cars and with a special proficiency at concerts and lectures. I am, when pressed, able to nap standing up. In certain select company, I wish I could nap while being spoken to. I have not yet learned to nap while I myself am speaking, though I have felt the urge to do so. I had a friend named Walter B. Scott who, in his late 60s, used to nap at parties of 10 or 12 people that he and his wife gave. One would look over and there Walter would be, chin on his chest, lights out, nicely zonked; he might as well have hung a Gone Fishing sign on his chest. Then, half an hour or so later, without remarking upon his recent departure, he would smoothly pick up the current of the talk, not missing a stroke, and get finely back into the flow. I saw him do this perhaps four or five times, always with immense admiration.

FROM "THE ART OF THE NAP"
by Joseph Epstein writing as Aristides, Summer 1995

For many years I kept my uneasiness about becoming a success in education to myself. I did so in part because I wanted to avoid vague feelings that, if considered carefully, I would have no way of dealing with; and in part because I felt that no one else shared my reaction to the opportunity provided by education. When I began to rehearse my story of cultural dislocation publicly, however, I found many listeners willing to admit to similar feelings from their own pasts. Equally impressive was the fact that many among those I spoke with were *not* from nonwhite racial groups, which made me realize that one can grow up to enter the culture of the academy and find it a "foreign" culture for a variety of reasons, ranging from economic status to religious heritage.

FROM "GOING HOME AGAIN: THE NEW AMERICAN SCHOLARSHIP BOY"
by Richard Rodriguez, Winter 1974–75

Jessy has not lost her capacity for autistic delight. What makes her happy today? Once she'd exult over her discovery that "70003 is a *prime!*" Then numbers became what she calls "too good," so good that she would speak them only in whispers, or refuse to say them at all. Then her interest subsided; other things evoked her secret smile. Stars. Rainbows. Clouds. Weather phenomena. Quartz heaters. Odometers. Street lamps. A strange procession of obsessions, eliciting for a year or two an intensity of emotion approaching ecstasy, then subsiding into mere pleasure. Wordless once, now she could be thrilled by a word, a phrase. "Asteroid explosion." "Digital fluorescent number change." Recently it's anything to do with banks, checks, above all *fees*. "There's a fee in feeling! And feet!" We know that special smile, that faraway gaze. But don't, don't ask her "Why are you smiling?" The phrase itself (and there are others) invites desolation, the banshee wail. We don't know why.

FROM "EXITING NIRVANA"
by Clara Claiborne Park, Spring 1998

One dubiously sunny Irish summer day in Dublin I was walking along the city's eastern beach-rim when my friend told me that this wasn't just any eastern beach-rim—the kind of place in, say, Barcelona or Sydney where you might casually toss Frisbees—but in fact literary holy ground: Sandymount strand. A sophisticated modernist shiver, dressed in a bow tie and a bowler hat, with a pince-nez and a small mustache, sauntered up and down my spine.

We had been reenacting, accidentally, the "Proteus" episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus's morning beachwalk: probably the most famous moody-brooding in world literature since Hamlet's soliloquies. The episode's opening phrase, "Ineluctable modality of the visible," is one of the best-known moments in the world's least-read best-known novel—most likely because it's the last thing most people see before giving up on *Ulysses* forever.

FROM "RE: RE: RE: RE: RE: JOYCE:
A PRIVATE SUMMERLONG BLOOMSDAY"
by Sam Anderson, Summer 2004

I fell in love with Gilbert and Sullivan at a tender age, and imbibed all the words and music before I could possibly understand their full context and meaning. I therefore, and invariably, enjoy a bizarre and exhilarating, if mildly unsettling, experience every time I attend a performance today. An old joke, based on an ethnic stereotype, that may pass muster as a mock on a privileged group in an age of political correctness, asks why the dour citizens of Switzerland often burst into inappropriate laughter during solemn moments at Sunday church services: "When they get the jokes they heard at Saturday night's party." Similar experiences attend my current Sundays with Gilbert and Sullivan, although my delays between hearing and comprehension extend to 40 years or more!

FROM "THE TRUE EMBODIMENT OF EVERYTHING THAT'S EXCELLENT"
by Stephen Jay Gould, Spring 2000

After September 11, I saw for the first time that the flag—along with all its red, white, and blue collateral relations—is what a semiotician would call "polysemous": it has multiple meanings. The flag held aloft by the pair of disheveled hitchhikers who squatted next to their backpacks on Route 116, a mile from home, meant *We will not rape or murder you.* The red, white, and blue turban worn by the Sikh umbrella vendor a friend walked past in Dupont Circle, not far from the White House, meant *Looking like someone and thinking like him are not the same thing.* The flag on the lapel of a Massachusetts attorney mentioned in our local paper—on seeing it, his opposing counsel had whispered to a colleague, "I'm so screwed, do you have a flag pin I can borrow?"—meant *I am morally superior.* The flags brandished by two cowboy-hatted singers at a country fair we attended on the day the first bombs fell on Afghanistan meant *Let's kill the bastards.* The Old Glory bandana around the neck

of the well-groomed golden retriever I saw on a trip to Manhattan meant *Even if I have a Prada bag and my dog has a pedigree, I'm still a New Yorker and I have lost something.* The flag in our front yard meant *We are sad. And we're sorry we've never done this before.*

FROM "A PIECE OF COTTON"
by Anne Fadiman writing as Philonoë, Winter 2002

Though it may seem sacrilegious to say so, I can't help feeling that in certain respects the Internet has a lot in common with the Talmud. The Rabbis referred to the Talmud as a *yam,* a sea—and though one is hardly intended to "surf" the Talmud, there is something more than oceanic metaphors that links the two verbal universes. Vastness, a protean structure, and an uncategorizable nature are in part what define them both. When Maimonides, the great medieval commentator, wanted to simplify the organization of the Talmud, and reduce its peculiar blend of stories, folklore, legalistic arguments, anthropological asides, biblical exegesis, and intergenerational Rabbinic wrangling into simplified categories and legal conclusions, he was denounced as a heretic for disrupting the very chaos that, in some sense, had come to represent a divine fecundity. . . .

I have often thought, contemplating a page of Talmud, that it bears a certain uncanny resemblance to a home page on the Internet, where nothing is whole in itself but where icons and text-boxes are doorways through which visitors pass into an infinity of cross-referenced texts and conversations. Consider a page of Talmud. There are a few lines of Mishnah, the conversation the Rabbis conducted (for some 500 years before writing it down) about a broad range of legalistic questions stemming from the Bible but ranging into a host of other matters as well. Underneath those few lines begins the Gemarah, the conversation *later* Rabbis had about the conversation *earlier* Rabbis had in the Mishnah. Both the Mishnah and the Gemarah evolved orally over so many hundreds of years that even in a few lines of text, Rabbis who lived generations apart give the appearance, both within those discrete passages as well as by juxtaposition on the page, of speaking directly to each other. The text includes not only legal disputes but fabulous stories, snippets of history and anthropology, and biblical interpretations. . . . One feels, for all the Talmud's multiplicities, an organizing intelligence at work.

And yet when I look at a page of Talmud and see all those texts tucked intimately and intrusively onto the same page, like immigrant children sharing a single bed, I do think of the interrupting, jumbled culture of the Internet. For hundreds of years, *responsa,* questions on virtually every aspect of Jewish life, winged back and forth between scattered Jews and various centers of Talmudic learning. The Internet is also a world of unbounded curiosity, of argument and information, where anyone with a modem can wander out of the wilderness for a while, ask a question, and receive an answer. I find solace in thinking that a modern technological medium echoes an ancient one.

FROM "THE TALMUD AND THE INTERNET"
by Jonathan Rosen, Spring 1998

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

Not Compassionate, Not Conservative

A political traditionalist critiques our pseudo-conservative president

ETHAN FISHMAN

In 1954 the celebrated American historian Richard Hofstadter offered his explanation for McCarthyism in an essay he contributed to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR titled "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt." Looking back on his essay 11 years later, Hofstadter noted: "I have written nothing else of comparable brevity that aroused more attention or drew more requests for quotation or reprinting."

Seeking to understand the underlying social psychology of McCarthyism, Hofstadter borrowed the term *pseudo-conservative* from the philosopher Theodor Adorno to designate Americans who cloaked their "serious and restless dissatisfaction with American life, traditions and institutions" in the guise and rhetoric of conservatism. Hofstadter, who studied alternative explanations for political conduct, hypothesized that the dissatisfaction of 1950s pseudo-conservatives was based on a fear of loss of status common to open societies where social mobility is relatively fluid.

Compounding their fear in the McCarthy era was anxiety generated by the post–World War II nuclear arms race, which created a doomsday scenario in the minds of many Americans. In response to these fears, Hofstadter argued,

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alienated groups began describing themselves as conservative because the term appeared to identify them as being diametrically opposed to the forces they perceived were threatening both their lives and their social positions. As Hofstadter pointed out, however, from a strictly political perspective there was nothing authentically conservative about their arguments. In the first place, they were trying desperately to overturn the status quo of New Deal America—not to conserve it. Furthermore, they adhered to an ideology of anti-intellectualism, substituting feelings and emotions for the rational discourse that for millennia has characterized the history of Western conservative thought. "The pseudo-conservative tends to be more than ordinarily incoherent" about political issues, Hofstadter wrote. The result, he maintained, was a politics that emphasized unarticulated psychological impulses over reasonable analysis—a politics of the gut, in other words, rather than of the mind.

Another reason Hofstadter considered McCarthyism to be a form of pseudo-conservatism had to do with the rage with which it expressed its opposition to the American political system and with the reckless policies it supported. Conservatism as a political philosophy is analogous to conservatism as a personality trait. Both stress moderation, practicality, and prudence. "Look before you leap" and "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" might well be their credos. As Hofstadter reminded readers of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, however, McCarthyism had virtually nothing "in common with the temperate and compromising spirit of true conservatism in the classical sense of the word."

Today another form of pseudo-conservatism threatens American institutions. Under the administration of George W. Bush, our public policy has for six years been shaped by those who discount reason to practice a politics of largely inchoate sentiments.

In order to recognize the counterfeit quality of the pseudo-conservatism that Hofstadter identified, as well as the "compassionate conservatism" Bush sometimes espouses, one has only to turn to the political philosophies of Aristotle and Edmund Burke. It is in their works, notably Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* and Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), that the basic principles of the Western conservative tradition can be found. At the heart of Aristotle's and Burke's thinking is a belief in the existence of natural law, a set of moral ideals that gives meaning to such terms as honor, integrity, justice, and courage. Neither Aristotle nor Burke possessed much faith in the rationality and morality of human beings. They feared that without the guidance that natural law provides, humans would forfeit their opportunities to lead virtuous lives and establish just governments. Because Aristotle and Burke considered them to be universal, these moral ideas were meant to apply to every human relationship—including economics.

Aristotle and Burke supported private property and free enterprise on the basis of the distinguishing characteristic of human beings—the possession of a soul that makes it possible for us to exercise free will and

become unique individuals. One of the advantages of private property, they taught, is that it helps us to develop and manifest our individuality as well as to express one of their most cherished ideals, generosity. If people did not own property to share, they pointed out, generosity would be a largely empty virtue. But Aristotle's and Burke's support for private property and free enterprise was not unlimited. The standards of natural law require owners to treat workers the same way they would like to be treated if the roles were reversed and challenge merchants to provide consumers with a fair product at a fair price.

From this perspective, what makes the Bush administration an example of pseudo-conservatism is its dogmatic commitment to laissez-faire policies that deny the relevance of universal ideals and that rely primarily on market forces to guide economic activities. In its pursuit of laissez-faire economic policies, the Bush administration has relaxed banking standards, introduced no-bid government contracts, allowed private corporations greater access to public lands, and refrained from limiting monopolistic practices. It has sought, furthermore, to reduce governmental responsibility for the welfare of its elderly citizens by advocating the privatization of Social Security accounts.

By assuming that some form of economic justice will result from the relatively unchecked selfishness of individuals and corporations, the policies of the Bush administration contradict Aristotle's and Burke's negative views of human behavior. Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (1944) echoed Aristotle's and Burke's rejection of unlimited economic freedom for its smug optimism. Only people who think of themselves as "harmless egotists," Niebuhr remarked, could fail to understand that when the "economic process is left severely alone either the strong devour the weak, in which case monopoly displaces competition, or competition breeds chaos in the community."

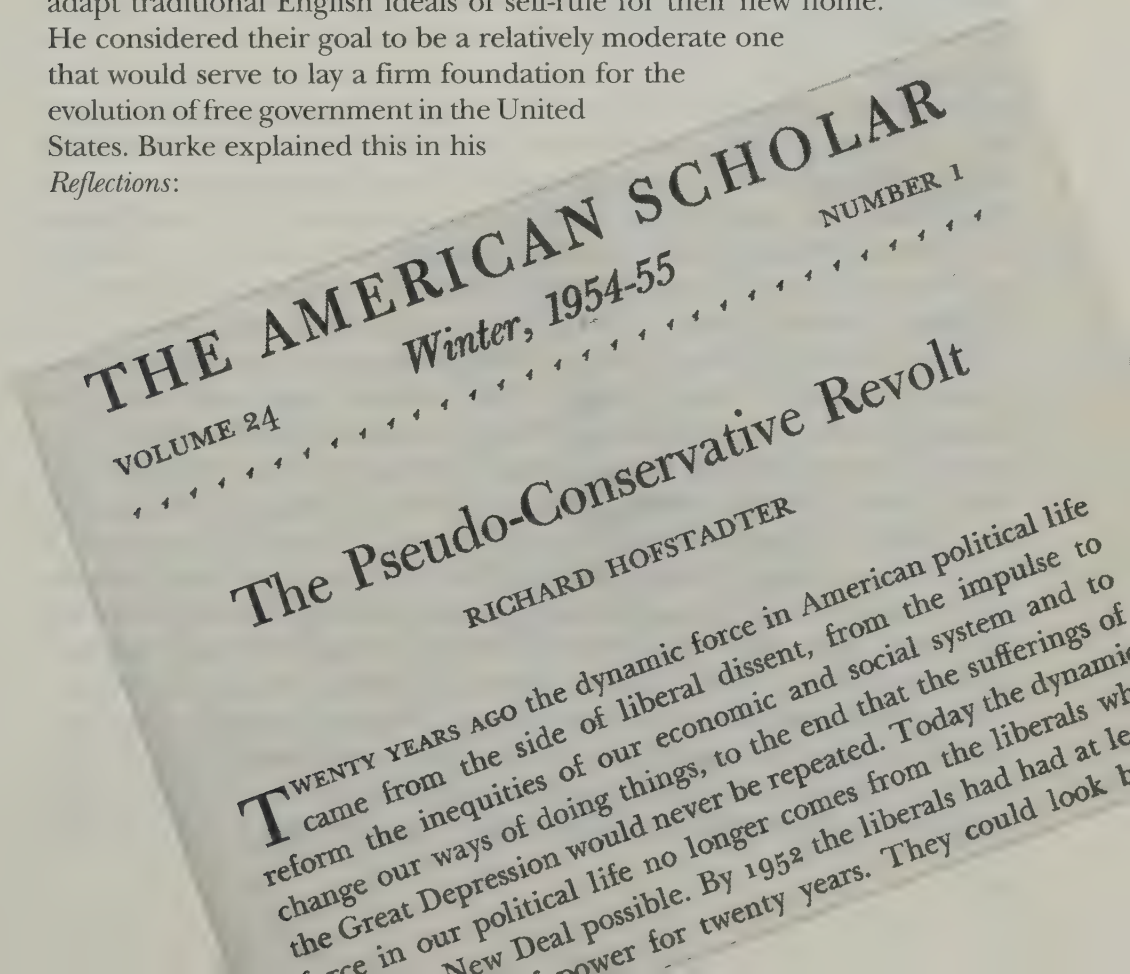
Consistent in its inconsistency, the Bush administration celebrates economic freedom while acting to curtail other basic American freedoms, such as privacy, religion, speech, and press. The same government that hesitates to apply explicit moral standards to economic behavior has had few qualms about restricting the Fourth Amendment right against warrantless searches, loosening rules on the confidentiality of medical records, supporting faith-based initiatives that cause citizens to subsidize religions to which they do not belong, ordering librarians to divulge information on material checked out by patrons, and attempting to influence the content of National Public Radio and public television. Equally disturbing has been its approach to sexual issues. Among the manifestations of pseudo-conservatism that Hofstadter observed in 1954 was the vindictive quality of the policies it espoused. By opposing abortion as well as convenient access to birth control, the administration has demonstrated a punitive attitude toward sexual conduct.

Another serious disconnect between the Bush administration and traditional Western political conservatism is its foreign policy. Although Aristotle

and Burke believed in universal ideals, they were not idealists. Instead, they practiced a politics of prudence that seeks to adjust immutable natural laws to constantly changing situations and circumstances. The unique value of prudence, Aristotle wrote, is its ability to ensure that governments do the right thing at the right time "in the right way." Burke called prudence "the first of all virtues" because it alone can teach governments how to bring "power and right" into harmony. Indeed, Burke's famous criticism of the French Revolution was based upon his appreciation of political prudence.

Although Burke promoted the ideal of free government as the necessary political correlate to personal free will, his understanding of prudence taught him that societies are organisms that require great care in order to endure and flourish. They can be modified, consequently, only with considerable thought and patience. At the end of the 18th century, France had been living under feudal autocrats for centuries. When the revolutionaries ignored their past and tried to introduce a historically unprecedented level of "liberty, fraternity, and equality" into their society virtually overnight, Burke predicted that death and destruction beyond anything the French had ever experienced would soon transpire.

Burke favored the American Revolution, on the other hand, because he judged Americans, as former English men and women, to be seeking to adapt traditional English ideals of self-rule for their new home. He considered their goal to be a relatively moderate one that would serve to lay a firm foundation for the evolution of free government in the United States. Burke explained this in his *Reflections*:


THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt

RICHARD HOFSTADTER

TWENTY YEARS AGO the dynamic force in American political life came from the side of liberal dissent, from the impulse to reform the inequities of our economic and social system and to change our ways of doing things, to the end that the sufferings of the Great Depression would never be repeated. Today the dynamic in our political life no longer comes from the liberals wh New Deal possible. By 1952 the liberals had had at le power for twenty years. They could look b

> I flatter myself that I love a manly, moral, regulated liberty as well as any gentleman. But I cannot stand forward and give praise or blame to anything which relates to human actions, and human concerns, on a simple view of the object, as it stands stripped of every relation, in all the nakedness and solitude of metaphysical abstraction. Circumstances (which with some gentlemen pass for nothing) give in reality to every political principle its distinguishing colour and discriminating effect. The circumstances are what render every civil and political scheme beneficial or noxious to mankind.

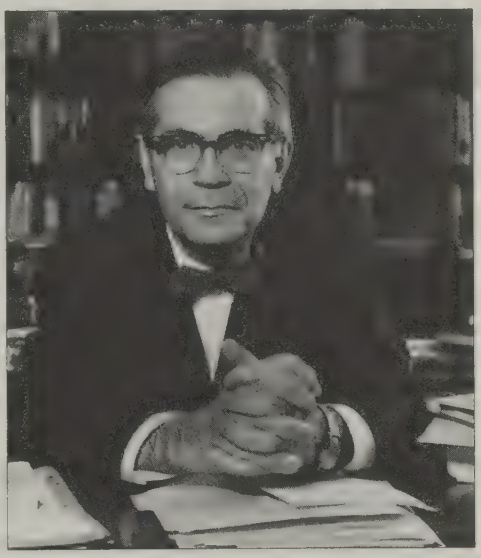
By Aristotle's and Burke's theories of evolutionary change, the Bush administration's decisions to invade and occupy Iraq were clearly imprudent. A number of explanations have been offered to justify these policies. One was that Saddam Hussein possessed nuclear weapons. Another was that he was in league with Al Qaeda terrorists who attacked the United States on 9/11. The latest is that we need to remake Iraq into a democracy that will serve as a political role model for the rest of the Middle East. Although the first two explanations have been discredited by the thorough investigations of several bipartisan congressional committees and independent commissions, the Bush administration continues to stick by them. This strategy calls to mind Hofstadter's observation that pseudo-conservatives are suspicious of reasonable analysis and often rely on knee-jerk reactions to reach policy decisions.

As Bush's former Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill revealed in Ron Suskind's book *The Price of Loyalty* (2004), the president in 2001—for reasons that were never explained fully and seemed like a snap judgment at the time—informed his cabinet that he was thinking seriously about overthrowing Saddam. It was especially shocking to O'Neill that Bush announced his convictions about Iraq only 10 days after his inauguration and a full eight months before 9/11. "Conviction is something you need in order to act," O'Neill said. "But your action needs to be proportional to the depth of evidence that underlies your conviction."

The third explanation is even more bewildering from a traditional conservative point of view. Iraq has never come close to being a democracy. The Iraqi people have never been free and rarely have shown an inclination to fight and die for freedom. In the context of Iraqi history, therefore, the administration's vision of a democratic Iraq is reminiscent of the mistakes made by the French revolutionaries. Both acted as if dreams can easily be translated into political reality. Both upheld the ideal of freedom, but neither was able to adapt that ideal to the specific circumstances they encountered. Both were unable to appreciate the staggering costs in human lives and property that are unavoidable when radical change is pursued over a very short period of time.

The Bush administration's attitudes toward the national debt and the environment represent another break with the Western conservative tradition. Aristotle's and Burke's writings remind today's generations that we have a moral responsibility to leave the world a better place for our descendants. This is why,

Walter Lippmann explained in *Essays in the Public Philosophy* (1955), "young men die in battle for their country's sake and why old men plant trees they will never sit under." After six years of a supply-side economic policy that increases government spending but declines to pay the bills by increasing taxes, however, the administration has left our children with a national debt of more than $8 trillion. By refusing to ratify the international Kyoto Protocol on global warming, deciding against requiring automobile manufacturers to raise fuel-efficiency ratings, withdrawing funds from the EPA, FEMA, and the Corps of Engineers, and discouraging wetlands-preservation projects, the administration may have set the stage for future environmental catastrophes on the order of Hurricane Katrina. Our children will have to cope with these disasters.



Richard Hofstadter described pseudo-conservatives of the 1950s.

Other similarities between Bush administration policies and Hofstadter's description of pseudo-conservatism include: hostility toward the United Nations; a penchant for amending the Constitution; an insistence on political conformity; an inability to make subtle distinctions between international players, which is required for effectiveness on the world political stage; and a reliance on the populist rhetoric of anti-intellectualism. John Bolton, Bush's U.N. ambassador, has taken the position that the institution is largely irrelevant. The Bush administration has supported amendments to the Constitution regarding flag burning and homosexual marriage. Americans who want to set a deadline for our troops' withdrawal from Iraq are described as traitorous "cut-and-runners." The failure of Senator McCarthy and his followers in 1954 to recognize that communist regimes in the Soviet Union, China, Yugoslavia, and Vietnam were different seems similar to the Bush administration's insistence that organizations such as Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Hamas are all part of a unified group of "Islamofascist" terrorists. Furthermore, the Bush administration's approach to such issues as creationism, placing replicas of the Ten Commandments in public places, and the Terri Schiavo debacle contains a good deal of anti-intellectual populist rhetoric.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of Hofstadter's 1954 AMERICAN SCHOLAR essay is its ability to explain more than 50 years later why traditional conservatives tend to get so exasperated with the Bush administration. Traditional conservatives—of whom I am one—consider themselves loyal citizens who want to believe that their president knows what he is doing. So we keep

SAM FAULK/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

trying, with little success, to appreciate the logic of his budget deficits, incoherent foreign policies, attacks on constitutional rights, anti-environmentalism, and puritanical attitude toward sex. What Hofstadter teaches us is that these policies were never meant to be understood logically in the first place. As he wrote in a later essay, "Pseudo-Conservatism Revisited—1965":

> As a rule, [pseudo-conservatism] does more to express emotions than to formulate policies. It is in fact hard to translate the claims of [its] policies into programs or concrete objectives . . . and for the most part the proponents of such politics, being less concerned with the uses of power than with its alleged misuse, do not offer positive programs to solve social problems. The operative content of their demands is more likely to be negative: they call on us mainly to prohibit, to prevent, to censor and censure, to discredit, and to punish.

Despite the brilliance of Hofstadter's analysis, there is a major difference between pseudo-conservatism and its traditional counterpart that he neglected to discuss. Aristotle's and Burke's pessimistic view of human nature, their belief in a system of natural law that sets moral parameters for human behavior, their development of a theory of prudence that appreciates the difficulties involved in translating morally preferable ideals into politically feasible policies, and their commitment to moderation and caution are major components of traditional conservatism's emphasis on doubt and limits. Traditional conservatives believe that the universe imposes profound restrictions on what individuals and governments can accomplish. They adhere, according to Noel O'Sullivan in his book *Conservatism* (1976), to a "philosophy of imperfection, committed to the idea of limits" that regards human beings as "imperfect, dependent" creatures who are "doomed to make the best of things by the more modest policies of compromise and accommodation."

The Bush administration, however, has not consistently recognized doubt and limitations. Despite the burgeoning national debt, the administration declines to heed the advice of fiscal conservatives either to raise taxes or seriously reduce public spending. Despite the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, the administration persists in ignoring the warnings of prominent scientists about the destructive effects of global warming. Despite former Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki's concern that we would need "several hundred thousand soldiers" in Iraq, the administration went ahead with its preconceived plan for a diminished force. With a certainty bordering on arrogance, the administration has behaved as if it believes the national debt somehow will disappear, nature will heal global warming on its own, and Iraqis will soon come to their senses, welcome Americans as their saviors, and conclude that democracy is preferable to secular or religious tyranny.

Certainty in the face of strong evidence to the contrary is the hallmark of ideological thinking. Ultimately, it is the ideological quality of Bush administration policies that classifies them as pseudo-conservative. Whereas ideo-

logues advance one doctrinaire solution to every problem regardless of the circumstances, traditional conservatives expect political leaders to adjust their convictions to the situation at hand. Whereas ideologues prefer to deal with political abstractions, traditional conservatives seek to practice a more practical form of politics that operates, in Burke's words, on a level of "the more or less, the earlier or the later, and on a balance of advantage and inconvenience, of good and evil."

An especially troubling assault on traditional conservative limits and doubts has been the administration's adherence to a strategy for presidential leadership that it calls the "doctrine of the unitary executive." Among the people who participated in the formulation of this doctrine were Bush appointees Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and Justice Samuel Alito. Gonzales helped to develop it when he served as Bush's White House counsel; Alito, when he was a lawyer in Ronald Reagan's Justice Department. To the administration the "doctrine of the unitary executive" means that the executive branch can interpret laws any way it wants—even if its interpretation differs markedly from the directives of Congress and the Supreme Court.

Although this doctrine represents an egregious violation of the separation of powers, the president has used it with impunity. Bush has claimed that he will disregard laws prohibiting warrantless wiretapping of domestic phone calls. He has said that he intends to ignore the provisions of the Patriot Act with which he disagrees. When Bush announced that he vehemently opposed the Military Commissions Act being considered by Congress, which would restrict his ability to detain and torture enemy combatants, Congress caved in to the president's pressure and virtually granted him the power to interpret the Geneva Convention as he sees fit.

With the two-term presidential limit in effect and the end of the Bush administration in sight, can we expect that pseudo-conservatism is about to run its course? Do the recent midterm election results indicate that moderate Americans have grown disillusioned with pseudo-conservative policies? Only for the time being, Hofstadter would maintain. Just as McCarthyism was followed by the presidential campaigns of Barry Goldwater and George Wallace, Richard Nixon's "Silent Majority," the Reagan presidency, and the current administration, it is inevitable that another version of pseudo-conservatism will appear on the American political scene.

As long as citizens remain fearful of their status in society and as long as Americans continue to dread attacks from powerful enemies committed to the destruction of their country, Hofstadter warned, the specter of pseudo-conservatism never will completely vanish. In 1954, he prophetically noted: "We do live in a disordered world . . . of enormous potential violence, that has already shown us the ugliest capacities of the human spirit. . . . These considerations suggest that the pseudo-conservative political style . . . is one of the long waves of [contemporary] American history and not a momentary mood." ❖

Scooter and Me

Professing liberal doubt in an age of fundamentalist fervor

NICK BROMELL

> *When I say that the conservative lacks principles, I do not mean to suggest that he lacks moral conviction. The typical conservative is indeed usually a man of very strong moral convictions. What I mean is that he has no political principles which enable him to work with people whose moral values differ from his own for a political order in which both can obey their convictions.*
>
> —F. A. Hayek, *Why I Am Not a Conservative*

Ralph Waldo Emerson tells us that the history we're moving through finds its ultimate significance within us: "We are always coming up with the emphatic facts of history in our private experience, and verifying them here." Certainly this has been true for me. As I've looked out upon the public history of the past six years, my eyes have beheld the same ribbon of events everyone else has seen. But the meaning of this history has been strongly shaped and intensified by a purely accidental twist in my own private experience. I went away to boarding schools in the early 1960s, and at one of these my best friend was a boy named Scooter—Lewis "Scooter" Libby—who grew up to become Paul Wolfowitz's protégé, Dick Cheney's chief of staff, and one of the Bush administration's strongest advocates for the war in Iraq.

Life is doubtless peculiar for anyone who has a childhood or college friend go on to become stupendously successful and powerful. How can you not judge yourself by the standard of his monumental achievement? How can you not feel small and unworthy in comparison?

In my case, these feelings have been further complicated by my being deeply opposed to the Bush administration, which I regard as dishonest and dangerous. But there's still another fact of my private life that colors the way I see the world: the reason I went to boarding school is that my father and

Nick Bromell teaches English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His essays have appeared in *The Boston Review, The Georgia Review, Harper's,* and *The Sewanee Review.*

The author, left, and Scooter Libby on graduation day, 1965

mother were living out of the United States, posted to American embassies in Arab capitals like Baghdad, Amman, Kuwait, and Cairo. This means that for me, Scooter and his neoconservative colleagues have not only set the nation on a disastrous course, they have also destroyed my father's lifelong effort to make U.S. policy in the Middle East more responsive to the realities on the ground. And there's one last consideration, which has to do with what my father actually did in those embassies—something that gives the outing of Valerie Plame a personal, not just a public significance.

So, for six years I've been obsessed with Scooter. Every time I read a newspaper, I see Scooter and me hunched over a game of Stratego (which he usually won), or I see him faking right before hooking left so I can hit him with a pass in the end zone. Walking my dog through the woods around our house, I chant the mantra of questions I literally ache to ask him: How could you work for an administration that denies global warming and supports tax breaks for large SUVs? How could you work for an administration that cuts funding for birth control to the poorest people in our country and the world? How could you so brazenly exaggerate the threat of Saddam Hussein having weapons of mass destruction, and how could you so foolishly imagine that American troops would be welcomed in Baghdad with cheers and flowers?

I still fling these questions into the silent woods. They are personal questions, private questions, and no one but me ever hears them. Yet at the same time they are public questions, asked by millions of Americans, and they vent the anger and the anguish that have marked the public history of a deeply divided nation. Eight years ago I was appalled by the viciousness of Republican attacks on Bill Clinton. Now, I am ashamed that I thrill to equally vicious attacks on George Bush. But what can I do? If fundamentalist Christians are outraged by the prospect of gay marriage becoming legal, how can I be less outraged by their denying the humanity of my gay friends? In my hotter moments—I have fewer and fewer cool moments these days—I ask Scooter whether his political identification with homophobia is distinguishable from a political identification with racism or anti-Semitism. And convinced that it is not, I sit down at my desk to do it: to write the letter telling Scooter that I can no longer be his friend, not even in the rather distant way we have been friends for all these years.

Today, my old friend is under indictment for obstructing justice by lying

COURTESY OF NICK BROMELL

about his knowledge of the Valerie Plame affair. Unless his lawyers manage to engineer a miracle, he will be tried in court early in 2007. There he will face the distinct possibility of public disgrace and a career-terminating jail sentence. So what should I hope for, I ask myself: my old friend's acquittal or his conviction?

The window of my study faces north. If our house stood on higher ground, I could see 15 miles up the winding Connecticut River to the squat bulk of Mount Pocumtuck. Forty years later, Scooter surely remembers our old school song as well as I do:

Eaglebrook, upon your mountain
Still across the valley gaze,
Where we worked and played together,
In our boyhood's merry days.

We met in a dorm of cubicles—*cubies*—on our first night at Eaglebrook, in September 1961. Scooter was in the cubie next to mine, and because the walls stopped a foot short of the ceiling, we could easily talk to each other after lights out. We probably whispered *Where are you from, what does your father do, what sports do you like?* But the heart of our chatter was fear and loneliness. We were 11 years old. We were away from home. We were going to sleep in this dorm for the next nine months, and neither of us would ever live with his parents again. Lying there in the dark, we sent threads of feeling up over the wall that separated our cubies. We became friends. Entering what we already sensed would be a cruelly competitive environment, we became allies.

Life at Eaglebrook was as beautiful and intense as an ice storm. On top of a mountain, a mile from the nearest paved road, we awakened some winter mornings to find four feet of thick snow blanketing the paths. Indoors, the steam radiators clanked to life, and the rooms smelled like wet wool and dusty wood. Scooter and I gave up learning to ski and stayed warm playing basketball in the gym. Two of the smallest boys in the school, we swam in our uniforms, our eyes barely level with the chests of the guys on the other teams. When spring finally came, pushing skunk cabbage up from the wetlands around the athletic fields, we lingered in the twilight on the way back to the dorm, tossing a baseball back and forth as the peepers shrilled in the woods around Whipple Pond.

But the intensity of Eaglebrook was also social. An idiom of incessant and often vicious teasing. What we called *cutting*—a perpetual cutting *down* and cutting *to shreds.* Anderson, Bishop, Bromell, Casey, Coon—all of us were players in an ugly competition for something we couldn't even name. We imitated Mr. Canoon's stutter, we mocked Mr. Hepburn's girth, we made lewd jokes about Mr. Wiechert's daughters. We moved across the green campus laughing, but also cutting and slashing, parrying and thrusting. *What*

a fairy. He's so immature. Get bent. Don't be Jewish. Dork. Brown nose. Jock. Retard.

In his book *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy*, Robert D. Dean offers this account of what such schools were really about:

> Boys were taken from their homes and families in early adolescence and sent off to remote rural schools, an innovation that replaced the private tutors and private day schools previously employed by wealthy American families to educate their sons. One object of such an extreme solution to the problem of child rearing was to strip away a boy's personal identity and replace it with an understanding that "the collective identity of the group must take precedence over individual identities."

At Eaglebrook, the intricate simplicity of the system designed to strip away selfhood would have made even Thackeray marvel. Everything revolved around the single principle of status, which was finely elaborated through grades, sports, shoes, shirts, and even socks. Each and every blazer-clad boy knew his place on the status ladder, strove to rise a rung, or dreaded sliding down. At the top were the boys who had everything that counted: family money, athletic ability, and WASPy good looks. Beneath them stood boys with any one of these gifts. And then in the middle came the boys like Scooter and me—small and fairly brainy, but interested in sports and not hopelessly nerdy. Below us were the untouchables, the social misfits who read all the way through *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, played countless hands of bridge, and managed the athletic teams.

We all heard *leadership* intoned again and again at chapel, assembly, commencement, and building dedications. Wearing our school blazers and ties, sitting on folding metal chairs and listening to the headmaster ("Chief Yellow Finger" we called him, because his hands were stained from the cigarettes he smoked incessantly), we knew what leadership really meant. It had nothing to do with leading, much less with taking risks, and not at all with acting ethically. A leader was just a boy with an unusual talent for submission. A boy could win the top perch as a prefect and become an official leader just because he was preternaturally preppy or could throw a football with a tight spiral. Not even the most golden among us was capable of actual leadership.

Within this disciplining system, Scooter and I had two things that were really our own—touch football and friendship, almost one and the same. Through friendship, we exercised judgment and expressed our values. Through friendship, we unconsciously clung to the self that the school insisted we forget. Through friendship, we escaped the otherwise unceasing competition of classroom and playing field. And through friendship, we recovered a portion of what we had lost on leaving home: affection, even love.

Did we know this at the time? Definitely not. We were too busy playing touch football outside and sock basketball in our dorm. We were too busy

being boys who had to pretend that they were men. (*Immature* was one of the unkindest cuts one could give or get.) But 40 years later, Scooter and I both know that if one of us calls the other and asks for help, he will get it. Forty years later, we both carry within us the weight of bonds formed years ago. If today I feel those bonds as a burden, that's only because I have also felt them as a gift.

After our graduation in 1965, Scooter went on to Andover, majored in political science at Yale, and got his law degree at Columbia. I went on to schools in Beirut and Cairo. When the June 1967 war forced me to return to the States for my senior year, I chose to go to Andover because Scooter was there. I then majored in classics and philosophy at Amherst and received a doctorate in English from Stanford.

HE HAS SPENT MOST of the past six years strategizing with the vice president of the United States; I have spent them teaching classes and grading papers at a public university.

....

Over the years, Scooter and I have stayed in touch, seeing each other more often even as our differences have become more obvious and grave. Twenty years ago, he came up to Massachusetts for an Eaglebrook reunion and spent the night at our house. That was our first real contact in a long time, and we made the most of it. Scooter was intensely present, a good listener, witty, self-deprecating, and thoughtful. I liked him. I saw him a few years later when I was in Washington for a conference, and he made a special point of introducing me to the woman he would later marry. Six years ago, when he was still unknown to the public, my wife flew him up to be the surprise guest at my 50th birthday celebration.

Soon after our troops were in Baghdad, I offered to fly down to D.C. to give him the perspective of someone who, while by no means an Arabist or Middle East expert, had at least lived in the region and knew something of that world through his senses. Scooter knew that I strongly disapproved of the invasion, but he courteously welcomed my offer. We had a long lunch in the White House Mess, and he listened attentively and took notes as I spoke.

More recently, as I've been dealing with the monster of colon cancer, he has found time in his incredibly busy schedule to give me an occasional call to see how I am doing. During one of our conversations, I told him about a Buddhist parable I'd found very helpful. For reasons that will become clear, it's worth retelling now.

A poor farmer whose only worldly possession is a mare wakes up one morning to discover that the mare has gone. He runs to his parents' house

and breaks the terrible news. When he's finished, they ask, "Are you sure it's bad news?"

"Of course it's bad news!" he replies, stomping angrily away.

Ten days later, his mare returns, bringing with her a magnificent stallion. The farmer runs to his parents and tells them the wonderful news.

"Are you sure it's good news?" they ask.

"Of course it's good news," he declares, leaving in a huff.

Days go by, and the farmer decides to try to break the stallion. He bridles the beast, climbs on its back, and is promptly thrown to the ground and trampled. The village doctor informs him that he will be a cripple for life. When he can do so, he makes his way to his parents and tells them the dreadful news.

"Are you sure it's bad news?" they reply.

He doesn't answer, but he mutters to himself all the way home.

Two weeks later, a detachment of the Emperor's army arrives to draft all the able-bodied men of the village. Of course, they pass over the crippled farmer. He hobbles to his parents' house to share his joy.

"Are you sure it's good news?" they ask.

The story has no end, of course, but the point is clear: we should try to experience what happens to us without judging it. Nearly a year after I told Scooter this story, he was indicted for perjury and obstruction of justice. I let a few days go by, and then I called to say I was thinking of him. The timbre of his voice as well as his words told me that he was very glad to hear from me. But he had no time to talk; he was on another line. He would get back to me later.

Just as I was putting down the receiver, I heard his voice again.

"Nick?"

"Yes?"

"Are you sure it's bad news?"

That's Scooter in a nutshell. I was moved.

But close as we sometimes are, Scooter and I are also very different. He was reportedly billing at $800 an hour while in private practice as a lawyer; my annual income has never exceeded five figures. He has spent most of the past six years strategizing with the vice president of the United States in the Old Executive Office Building; I have spent them teaching classes and grading papers at a public university. But there's a deeper divide that's more important. It has to do with beliefs and values, and it's rooted in our different ways of seeing the world.

This difference came into sharp focus when I happened to read an article by Lynne Cheney, the wife of his boss. As an English professor, I couldn't resist its title: "The Roots of Today's Lying Epidemic: The English Department Virus." In it, Cheney claims that lowly English departments are "a primary source of the epidemic of lying currently upon us."

I assume that Scooter knows Lynne Cheney well, laughs with her at the dinner table, brings his family over to the vice president's mansion, and considers her a friend much as he thinks of me as an old buddy. And so, accused now of lying himself, he must know that she regards me and my colleagues as condoners of lying, and my life's work as a major contribution to the problem of lying that besets our country. Of course I'm angered. And hurt. But once I get past these feelings, and past the words *kettle* and *black,* I begin to see that Cheney's views are useful because they bring into view the essence of the conflict that is tearing us all—friends, nation, world—apart.

Cheney begins by claiming correctly that most English professors believe that "knowledge and power are always intertwined." But she goes on to assert that as a consequence of this belief, we also maintain that "there is no such thing as truth." This is false, and I suspect that she knows it's false. Certainly it's illogical. Cheney's error, possibly deliberate, is her sleight-of-hand removal of the definite article *the* from its crucial place beside the noun *truth.* Yes, most English professors and intellectuals today do believe that knowledge and power are intertwined. But no, we do not maintain that there is no such thing as truth. We believe, rather, that there is no such thing as *the* truth, no such thing as truth conceived of as an eternal verity standing apart from power and outside the push and pull of human history.

Our skepticism toward this conception of *the* truth follows from our observation that people living in different times and places have held very different notions of what that is. For Buddhists *the truth* is one thing, for Christians it is another, and for Moslems it is yet another. With so many versions of the truth competing so fiercely with one another, we ask whether the term itself is actually helpful. Two hundred years ago, most Christian ministers confidently asserted that *the* truth as revealed in the Bible justified the enslavement of blacks. They also believed that this truth required all women to obey their husbands and cede to them all authority, including the right to own property, deliberate on matters of public importance, and vote.

Cheney sees, I'm sure, that despite its claim to be *the* truth, this was only *a* truth that held sway for many hundreds of years until it was displaced by another truth—that the rights of man are equally shared by blacks and women. As two persons with strong (if different) views about what is good and true, Cheney and I both know that our acknowledgment that truth can change over time does not logically entail a complete dismissal of truth as a criterion for words and deeds. Cheney would not speak out on public issues and I would not take the time to quarrel with her if we did not feel that truth mattered.

The difference between us, then, has more to do with temperament than reason. Cheney may have omitted the little word *the* from her essay because she knew that its presence would vitiate her attack on me and my colleagues; but I don't think she's expunged it from the way she herself feels and thinks about the world. Cheney wants to avail herself of the malleabil-

ity of truth insofar as that has conferred on her rights and privileges that earlier constructions of truth denied her. But at the same time, she is frightened by the implications of such a view. She worries that without the pole star of a fixed conception of the truth, we will lose our bearings and descend into chaos. She wants to hold on to the idea of the truth as something ahistorical, unchanging, permanent, and universal—even though it was precisely this conception of truth that had stood in the way of her rights as a woman, later blocked African Americans' rights, and now blocks her own daughter's rights as a lesbian.

I, on the other hand, feel that the old idea of *the* truth has become an impediment. It provokes hostility rather than understanding. It encourages self-righteousness instead of tolerance. I am uneasy about sailing ahead with nothing but dead reckoning to guide us, but I'm pretty sure that this is all we have ever done. In the last analysis, I would prefer to live in a future of competing truths, where anyone claiming to know *the* truth would be laughed at. Like Judge Learned Hand, I believe that "the spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right." In short, I am a liberal by temperament, and Cheney is a fundamentalist.

A liberal, as I use the term, is someone who never gives up trying to see the other person's point of view. A liberal never stops doubting himself, for self-doubt is precisely what allows us to make room in our minds for someone else's views and to keep the possibility of communication between us alive. A fundamentalist, on the other hand, is someone to whom the very idea of point of view is immaterial, or worse—the foundation of relativism. A warrior who pledges fealty to the god of one Truth, a fundamentalist searches for personal conviction, not mutual understanding. So she regards skepticisms as apostasy, hesitations as heresy, and doubts as moral turpitude.

Taped to the wall above my desk is a photograph of President George W. Bush's war council torn from the March 23, 2003, *New York Times*. Gathered around the conference table at Camp David sit a handful of the world's most powerful persons: Paul D. Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, George Tenet, Donald H. Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Andrew Card, the 43rd president himself—and one other figure, just to Card's right. I peer into the photo, marveling. That's Scooter Libby. My old best friend and roommate. That's you—the guy I used to play Stratego with—sitting in the world's innermost ring of power.

At the very moment when globalization has presented us with a new dream of world unity, the so-called clash of civilizations has ripped apart that fantasy. Twenty years ago, we imagined that the end of the Cold War would fracture a bipolar world into myriad units and morphing conflicts and alliances, and we hoped that the reach of global trade and technology could bring these pieces into an orderly mosaic. Instead, war's end revealed what

President Bush meets with his war council at Camp David, Saturday, March 22, 2003.

ERIC DRAPER, ASSOCIATED PRESS

the conflicting political ideologies of that struggle had held in check and kept invisible: a deeper struggle between tradition and modernity, faith and agnosticism, monism and pluralism, fundamentalism and, yes, liberalism.

Scooter has taken a position on one side of that fault line. He was a fundamentalist serving in a fundamentalist administration, and his views are spelled out not just in his deeds but in his words. Scooter is a co-signer and very probably the co-author, with Wolfowitz, of a work that has been published in several forms: as the Defense Policy Guidance of 1992, as the so-called Wolfowitz memorandum sent to President Clinton in 1997, and as "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces, and Resources for a New Century," published in 2000 by the Project for the New American Century (PNAC).

The salient idea of this document has become well known: that in the wake of the Cold War, "the United States faces no global rival. America's grand strategy should be to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible." The document claims to be "a blueprint for maintaining U.S. preeminence, precluding the rise of a great power rival, and shaping the international security order in line with American principles and interests."

What I want to ask Scooter today is how the United States can shape "the international security order in line with American principles and interests" if those principles include—as the document implies—the right of a nation to seek preeminence. After all, if we aim to shape the world in accordance with that principle, aren't we inviting the other nations of the world to emulate us and thereby to seek preeminence themselves? Scooter's

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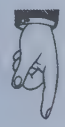

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is essentially a fundamentalist "security order," a zero-sum strategy in which security is achieved only by hegemony.

The fundamentalist nature of this strategy is underscored by its now glaring failure to make any mention of terrorism. The word does not appear even once in the 90-page PNAC document. The PNAC plan is preoccupied instead with the threat posed by "lesser states" to "the exercise of American leadership around the globe."

So why, I want to ask Scooter, didn't all this tough-minded talk about "tomorrow's threats and tomorrow's battlefields" foresee that tomorrow might be September 11 and that the battlefield might be lower Manhattan? The answer is that however smart Scooter might be, and he is very smart indeed, a fundamentalist mind sees the world simplistically. Such a mind cannot see the world in terms of fluid relationships and reciprocities, but only as a standoff between the forces struggling for preeminence. It cannot conceive that "the presence of American forces in critical regions around the world" as "the visible expression of the extent of America's status as a superpower" might *inflame* anti-American sentiment and possibly *inspire* such acts of suicidal terrorism. The fundamentalist mind will not admit that to define our own security as "deterring or, when need be, compelling regional foes to act in ways that protect American interests" is to mirror back to Osama bin Laden and Kim Jong-il their most paranoid imaginings of what our "American principles" are all about. When such a mind writes strategy for the world today, it's like a musclebound bodybuilder doing battle with mosquitoes: the more iron he pumps, the bigger the target he offers and the more succulent his veins.

For all their obvious intelligence, Scooter, Wolfowitz, and Cheney are blind to these possibilities because they are locked in a monist mindset, according to which only one power can be dominant, only one nation's "principles and interests" can prevail, and only one truth can be recognized as *the* truth. Just like Lynne Cheney, her husband and Scooter believe in one world order controlled by just one nation and motivated by just one principle: the urge to be preeminent. They believe in one Truth, and they're willing to go to the wall for it—even, perhaps, if that means bending it.

As 2006 draws to a close, Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" feels more like a clash of different fundamentalisms. And that is the dynamic through which fundamentalism prevails. It wins by controlling the terms of the engagement and forcing its opponents to become fundamentalists themselves. Americans don't need to look across the ocean to see where this kind of struggle leads. We have our own examples here at home. First the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center pushed the Bush administration, already leaning that way, squarely into the arms of its fundamentalist strategists and its right-wing political base. Then the excesses and the lies of the Bush administration started turning liberals

and progressives into the very thing they despise. More intolerant, self-righteous, and arrogant by the day, we are quickly becoming fundamentalists ourselves.

In my own experience, this pernicious trend resolves itself finally into the matter of whether I should remain Scooter's friend and what verdict I should hope for at his trial. There's a part of me that wants to see him get nailed. There's a part of me that wants to end the endless imagined conversations I've been having with him, that wants to stop peppering him with "How can you?" questions, that wants to arrive at the Zen clarity of the warrior who focuses on one thing only: victory.

But there's another part of me—call it the lingering liberal part—that tries to be fair to Scooter's point of view, that doesn't want to consign him to the camp of "the enemy," that wants to keep lines of communication open. The dialogue between these selves has become a Möbius strip of intertwining questions: Would remaining Scooter's friend be the surest way I have of remaining true to the principles of liberalism, as I understand that word? Or would it just be an excuse for my failure to face a difficult situation, and one that makes me a sucker as well? Would recognizing Scooter as my enemy be the honest thing to do, and the only thing he would truly respect? Or would that decision turn me into the very thing I worry he has become?

WOULD REMAINING Scooter's friend be the surest way I have of remaining true to the principles of liberalism, as I understand that word?

....

These private questions are much like those in our political conversations today. What is the best way to combat terrorism? Should we take the war to the enemy, even when we aren't sure where the enemy lurks? Or should we engage in a long, protracted, possibly endless strategy of rope-a-dope—limiting, containing, and slowly putting out the fires of anti-Americanism?

When I turn my personal questions about Scooter into these public questions about foreign policy, I regain my footing and know my way. I know that terrorists aren't out to grab American assets. What they hate is a certain image of America, America as a cultural chauvinist trying to impose its principles and interests on the rest of the world. This is the stereotype, becoming truer by the day, on which Osama bin Laden has played so cunningly. Several years ago, the CIA reported that the Arab world regarded us as "ruthless, aggressive, conceited, easily provoked and biased." The CIA also warned that as long as "the forces fueling hatred of the U.S. and fueling al Qaeda recruiting are not being

addressed, . . . the underlying causes that drive terrorists will persist."

If I and the authors of this report are correct, then the best way for the United States to combat the religious fundamentalism that underwrites terrorism is to remain a liberal state guided by liberal principles. The worst thing we can do is precisely what the Bush administration has promoted: become a fundamentalist nation that mirrors bin Laden's fantasies back to him and thus confirms them.

The challenge we liberals face today is to match the fundamentalists' passionate intensity while still remaining true to our deepest convictions: a preference for tolerance over righteousness, fairness over success, and communication over certitude. Indeed, our deepest value might be self-doubt. It tortures us, but it keeps us open-minded. It makes us laugh at ourselves. And it reminds us to wince whenever we hear someone proclaim, as the vice president is wont to do, that *simply stated, there is no doubt.*

Self-doubt drives me back one more time to Lynne Cheney's article. Do her words contain no wisdom at all? Can it be that we liberals are entirely right, the fundamentalists entirely wrong? After all, what should the liberal mind be open to—if not to the exposure of its own blindness?

Such exposure is exactly what Cheney's article has to offer if we read it carefully and do justice to the complexity of its motives. Much as it might gratify my own self-righteousness to think so, Cheney is not just writing mindless, right-wing propaganda. She is also energized by a conviction that we humans are self-deceiving and lost if we do not acknowledge our need for a transcendental realm that is true with a capital T. Cheney wants us to be humble in the face of our own limitations, and in particular the limitations on what we can really know. She believes that it's not enough for us to keep creating and revising truths that work for a moment and then get set out for recycling. She believes that such a conception of the human enterprise exaggerates what humans are capable of: we cannot be the ultimate arbiters of what is true because we ourselves do not know enough, and it is hubris to imagine that we do. We have to submit to something outside ourselves, untouched by our puny powers, and beyond the pathetic purview of our history. We have to submit to the Truth.

If Lynne Cheney and I were to meet, here's what I imagine she would say to me: "You liberals may have good reasons to be skeptical about the very possibility of *the* truth, but you insist on using the words *true* and *truth* as if they had real meaning without recourse to such a possibility. If you were intellectually honest, you would restrict yourself to words like *correct* and *accurate.* If you want to glorify your mere assertions with the numinous associations of the word *truth,* you should embrace the possibility of the numinous itself. By using *true* and *truth* while denying the very possibility of the Truth, you are trying to have your cake and eat it too. You want to use a word that comes trailing clouds of glory to ennoble your scrawny human enterprise and to conceal its dangerous vanity."

And Cheney would be right. We liberals do want to hold onto the word *true* because we know that behind our policy proposals lurks a deep sense of right and wrong, a deep instinct about what makes life valuable and meaningful. But we do not fully articulate these beliefs, and we seldom even admit that we have them. Because they rest at bottom on conviction, not reason, and therefore cannot be justified without circularity, we hesitate to bring them into the open. We are nervous about admitting that in this sense our politics are as faith-based as those of any fundamentalist.

This is a failure of nerve, and it has two consequences: to people like Cheney we appear hypocritical, and to many others we appear uncommitted and indecisive. This is why the liberal temperament is challenged as never before. Everywhere in the world we are confronted by the fundamentalism that deposits bombs in commuter trains and that crafts Strangelovian strategies for global preeminence. In the face of these provocations, we are called upon to be firm but not inflexible, tough but not stubborn, determined but not dogmatic. We need something like faith, but it has to be a faith that makes room for the faith of others. Our deepest quarrel with fundamentalists in this country, then, is not about Iraq, health care, abortion, or gay rights. It's about the very possibility of trying to be true without needing *the* truth. It's about being able to commit to a truth while always remembering that this truth could be partial, incomplete, and provisional—a steppingstone forward, not an edifice of certitude.

So, to return to the question before me: as the day of Scooter's trial draws near, I try to commit myself to these liberal principles in my private life just as I have argued for their value in our public life. They encourage me to remain aware at all times of the irreducible human complexity of Scooter's life and work. They encourage me to think of him as a person and a friend, not as a figure and a foe. While I want the Bush administration to be held accountable for its blunders and its lies, I also want my friend Scooter to be proven innocent and to go home to his family. In short, I want things both ways.

If this attitude involves me in self-contradiction, so be it. The risk of a seeming inconsistency is one that liberals must take if we are to meet the complexities of the world as we know it. But we should undertake this risk agonizingly, not flippantly, taking the full measure of what is at stake as we make up our minds.

Looking at the snow swirling past my north-facing window, I'm reminded of Wallace Stevens's famous poem about the snowman who beholds the winter landscape and sees "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." We liberals think we're very good at living without illusions, seeing only what is "there" and needing nothing else. And so we mock fundamentalists who see "the nothing that is" and who seek to supplement it with something more, something transcendental, something True.

But if we really want to come to grips with the exigencies of our time, we will have to learn, like the snowman, to see both ways at once. ❖

Conflict and Culture

LANGDON HAMMER

Art is always produced during the "meanwhile" that begins Peter Filkins's poem "Water Lilies." In one sinuous sentence, its ideas and images suspended like floating flowers, Filkins meditates on the fact that Monet painted his late masterpiece within hearing of the guns of the Somme. Filkins invites us to wonder whether this is only a question of simultaneity, of coincidence, or whether there is an economy of culture whereby the Great War and Monet's water lilies are linked.

Art and violence come together in Caitriona O'Reilly's "Netsuke" in a different way. The poem is a dramatic monologue spoken by a geisha. The beautiful woman, kept by her lord, is like the precious bone or wood carving—"netsuke"—that is fastened to the obi binding the man's kimono and holding in place his pipe, purse, and writing tools. At the end of the poem, the courtesan takes her lord's knife and draws her own blood.

Robert Pinsky's "Forgetting" is a provocative fantasia on the forget-ability of any mark or monument of culture. Art, we like to think, is dedicated to the preservation of civilization, but perhaps not. Ezra Pound's anti-Semitism, Pinsky implies, is of a piece with his praise for the Emperor who charged "a committee of scholars / To pick the best 450 Noh plays and destroy the rest." Pinsky takes us to the poetry festival where, in 2002, Amiri Baraka read his 9/11 poem "Somebody Blew Up America." Baraka's claim that "the Jews / Were warned to get out of the Twin Towers before the planes hit" simply passed in and out of the minds of the "applauding and screaming" crowd in—Pinsky marvels—"an ecstasy of forgetting."

The forgotten are the starting place for Marilyn Nelson's poem "Nine Times Nine, on Awe." History is an "architecture of inequity" in which those "whose years were brief and harsh" are lost "while someone the world would remember was inventing an arch." She knows that the experience of art or culture is like every other form of conspicuous consumption: a way of "counting coup," of feeling good about ourselves. "But let us not deny the power of awe," she responds, writing in praise of praise itself.

Water Lilies

Claude Monet, 1917

PETER FILKINS

Meanwhile he painted them—water lilies
floating on the surface of a pond
he'd constructed "for the pleasure of the eye
and motifs to paint" at the century's end,
the new one begun with multiple explosions
of red, of pink, white fleshy flowers
against the backdrop of a subsurface blue

with distances, the sky itself reflected
in the watery calm where a cloud adrift
would later be captured by his brush
in motion, each day in the studio
another one spent to the echo of guns
bombarding the trenches, pummeling the Somme
erupting in billows of acrid black smoke

upon a horizon no longer present
but subsumed, erased, immersed as he was
in the flux of light on water, flowers
afloat on the air beneath a willow
and its weeping, our only perspective
in a lost world lost to bottomless translucency,
the eye that sees it, and the intractable sun.

Peter Filkins teaches writing and literature at Simon's Rock College of Bard. He is the author of two volumes of poetry, *What She Knew* and *After Homer*. His work has appeared in *The New Criterion*, *Paris Review*, and *Poetry*.

Nine Times Nine, on Awe

MARILYN NELSON

1.

An architecture of inequity
designs the lower floors of history,
the unchanged, uncountable crypts of misery
where the living and the dead are distinguished by their smell
—one stinks of sweat and shit; one stinks of hell—
and life goes on because lives are replaceable.
Forgotten, those whose years were brief and harsh,
who progressed from the bad to the even worse,
while someone the world would remember was inventing an arch.

2.

Always, the cobbled-over vestiges
whisper to what is now of what once was.
Their only explanation is Because.
The relics of uncanonized saints lie
under our sandals, as we hurry by
toward our goal of pizza in a café.
We balance on the shoulders of the great
and the nameless, faceless hordes under their feet,
whose histories whisper from the cobblestone streets.

3.

But let us not deny the power of awe:
to stand breathless, gaping, murmuring wow
is a modern equivalent of prayer.
We travel across miles and centuries
hoping beauty will knock us to our knees,
lost momentarily in ecstasies.
Is it to SEE we seek, or to BE SEEN?
In art's deep inner stillness do we mean
more than the suffering and brevity of being?

4.

Tourists imagine our lives will be changed
—new DNA, molecules rearranged—
simply by seeing the beautiful, the strange.
In Africa, we tick off The Big Five;
in Europe we visit works we recognize
from schoolbooks. The works of those who believed
in co-creation, working Hand on hand
with the Creator, make us understand
what the sacred once meant to humankind.

5.

Yet tourism can be a way of counting coup.
We e-mail photographs, as if to prove
Kilroy was here, on a Vespa through the Louvre.
Fra Angelico wept. May the sacrament of his tears
open our jaded hearts. No other cures
exist for this contagion of malaise,
except our humble bowing before art.
As they say, art is long, but life is short.
We know we rush to places in the dirt.

6.

Before we take off for the afterworld,
I'll shape this little verse into a gold
circlet around a beloved pate. Behold:
a priest canonized by secular love!
Let's raise an *alleluia* and an ave
for the one immortality mortals have:
art's imitation life, *la vie ersatz.*
If a poem has the power to stop the clocks,
here's to brief timelessness for Abba Jacques.

7.

The beautiful is mass-produced today
as cut-rate replicas for the *hoi polloi.*
Does assembly-line uniformity destroy
our experience of awe? Yes, the *David* cloned
moves us less than the one *David* alone.
Machine-made art cannot contain art's pain.
Reproductions cannot hold us rapt
like the illuminated manuscript
an old monk drew out of his prayerful depths.

8.

We want to care, but the funereal vase
made centuries ago simply because
someone was loved by someone else and lost,
we look at, and forget. Babylon's walls
remind us of a trip to Disney World.
Untutored in the art of seeing well,
we gaze at surfaces and eddy past.
Book learning doesn't change our peasants' taste,
even though we're now upper-middle class.

9.

Guidebooks can't tell us what we ought to feel
in front of Important Works. (Convenient small
full-color photos make it possible
to identify Important Works without wasting our time
on minor strivers.) As a rule of thumb,
however, it can't hurt to be struck dumb.
The awe of the aesthetic experience,
part of our universal inheritance,
makes us basilicas of reverence.

~ Marilyn Nelson, director of Soul Mountain Retreat (a writers' colony), is the author of *The Homeplace, Carver,* and *A Wreath for Emmett Till,* and (with Elizabeth Alexander) of the forthcoming *Miss Crandall's School for Young Ladies and Little Misses of Color.*

Netsuke

CAITRIONA O'REILLY

I walk on thin soles
this dense season.

No wind lifts the leaves,
the thickened stream

shakes no reeds.
I spread my fan,

hide half my wan
face, pale with lead,

pale with the shit
of nightingales.

The marks they limn
on my nape

might have been
knife marks,

stark when I blushed
at his figurines:

women and men coiled
round each other

like worms,
a tongue-cut sparrow,

a nest of rats.
They keep his objects

from sliding down
that long silk cord

he hangs beside
his genitals, and being

lost. When I draw
his blade across my

arm it resembles
water dripping over

a stone lip
in the stone garden,

runny wax
from a candle,

the new moon's
incised smile.

~Caitriona O'Reilly is an Irish poet, critic, and novelist. Her collections of poems include *The Nowhere Birds* and *The Sea Cabinet*.

Forgetting

ROBERT PINSKY

The forgetting I notice most as I get older is really a form of memory:
The undergrowth of things unknown to the young, that I have forgotten.

Memory of so much crap, jumbled with so much that seems to matter.
Lieutenant Calley. Captain Easy. Mayling Soong. Sibby Sisti.

And all the forgettings that preceded my own: Baghdad, Egypt, Greece,
The Plains, centuries of lootings of antiquities. Obscure atrocities.

Imagine!—a big tent filled with mostly kids, yelling for poetry. In fact
It happened, I was there in New Jersey at the famous poetry show.

I used to wonder, what if the Baseball Hall of Fame overflowed
With too many thousands of greats all in time unremembered?

Hardly anybody can name all eight of their great grandparents.
Can you? Will your children's grandchildren remember your name?

You'll see, you little young jerks: your favorite music and your political
Furors, too, will need to get sorted in dusty electronic corridors.

In 1972, Zhou Enlai was asked the lasting effects of the French
Revolution: "Too soon to tell." Remember?—or was it Mao Tse-tung?

Poetry made of air strains to reach back to Begats and suspiring
Forward into air, grunting to beget the hungry or overfed Future.

Ezra Pound praises the Emperor who appointed a committee of scholars
To pick the best 450 Noh plays and destroy all the rest, the fascist.

The stand-up master Stephen Wright says he thinks he suffers from
Both amnesia and déjà vu: "I feel like I have forgotten this before."

Who remembers the arguments when jurors gave Pound the only prize
For poetry awarded by the United States Government? Until then.

I was in the big tent when the guy read his poem about how the Jews
Were warned to get out of the Twin Towers before the planes hit.

The crowd was applauding and screaming, they were happy—it isn't
That they were anti-Semitic, or anything. They just weren't listening. Or

No, they were listening, but that certain way. In it comes, you hear it, and that
Self-same second you swallow it or expel it: an ecstasy of forgetting.

Robert Pinsky was the Poet Laureate of the United States from 1997 to 2000. His most recent books include *First Things to Hand*, a chapbook of poems; and *The Life of David*, a prose book examining the David stories. Pinsky teaches in the graduate writing program at Boston University.

Fear of Falling

Working in the mop-and-bucket brigade in college created the perspectives of a lifetime

JAMES McCONKEY

Like most college graduates, I am fond of my alma mater, though it exists only in historical records and the memories of those who attended it. In 1939, when I entered Cleveland College on a working scholarship, it seemed solid enough to last for centuries: a stone seven-storied building on Public Square (the center of downtown Cleveland) with stout Roman goddesses supporting the balconies on its façade. And its hallways, elevators, and classrooms were crowded with students, especially in the evening. Most of these evening students were adults, enrolled less for a degree than for courses to abet their knowledge of culture or to provide skills necessary for employment or a better job.

Each year, 20 students from the Cleveland area were granted scholarships like mine, and we made up the majority of the full-time students. The Depression had not yet lifted, and without those scholarships few if any of us could have attended college. In our first year, we had no work assignments; but as sophomores and upper-class students, some of us were elevator operators during the evening rush hours, while others sold textbooks or supported the staff in the mailroom, the publicity office, and at the telephone switchboard. Although other students were later to join me, I was the first to serve as a janitorial assistant, and it seems likely that the initial task that Joe Wilkes, the head custodian, gave me was simply an attempt to find something to occupy my allotted work hours. As instructed, I reported to him at 7:00 a.m. on a Monday morning. He led me to the basement locker room for women students, connected to the sinks and toilet stalls of the adjoining restroom by an archway without doors. My task was to dust off the tops of the 10 or 12 rows of lockers before the first woman arrived.

It embarrassed me to be assigned such a task—not because of its humble

James McConkey is Goldwin Smith Professor of English Literature Emeritus at Cornell. His books include *The Telescope in the Parlor, Court of Memory,* and *To a Distant Island.*

nature, but because I was a male in a place where I didn't belong. To complete the chore as quickly as I could, I used Joe's tall stepladder to climb to the top of each row. Moving on my knees, I sent a cloud of sooty dust and filaments of spider webs into the air and into my lungs. Despite my haste, the first young woman arrived before I was finished. Dismayed by her presence, I imagined she would be alarmed to find a man crouched on a locker above her head, a filthy rag in his hand; and so I called out to her, as cheerfully as I could, "Don't mind me: I'm just working my way through college."

Those words were the first ones I spoke to the slender and dark-haired girl I came to love. England and France had just declared war on Germany, but I, like most other Americans, felt our country safe from foreign strife. (Throughout the years of my public schooling, I'd been taught again and again the folly of warfare, with World War I as the prime example.) A few weeks before my graduation from college, though, I was an infantry private in the Army, my degree awarded in absentia. Jean, that slender, dark-haired girl, and I, drawn together over the years as members of the college newspaper's editorial staff, were married on the furlough I was granted just before my division embarked for Europe; the convoy arrived in Cherbourg a few days after the Normandy beachheads had been secured.

Serving as an obedient neophyte on a janitorial staff is not a bad preparation for service as an army private: in basic training, for example, my experience helped me pass inspection whenever a platoon lieutenant put on white gloves to test for dust on the frame of my bed or in corners of the high window behind it. Impressed by my speed in dusting locker tops, Joe Wilkes promoted me to the crew of custodians that on Saturday mornings washed and polished the tiles of the first-floor lobby and wide corridors—and that experience proved pertinent in the Army, too. Accompanied by the music of a radio playing at full volume, the rhythmic movements of the Saturday morning floor-cleaning squad had something in common with my infantry division's parade drills, during which row after row of soldiers stepped to the beat of Sousa marches—and, for that matter, with Tolstoy's depiction in *Anna Karenina* of the growing pleasure that Levin (surely the author's alter ego here) feels in joining the line of peasants scything a field. Two or three full-time custodians and I first mopped the floors with a solution of water and trisodium phosphate; and then, while the tiles were still wet, we moved in unison down the halls, rubbing the abrasive pads attached to our shoe soles against gum and other substances still marring the surface. Ultimately, after rinsing the floors with clean water, we waxed and buffed them. Before we left for the day, we admired our joint accomplishment, transitory though such shining floors were. I felt so joined to my fellow janitors that the following year I founded an organization of student and full-time custodians, Eta Mu Sigma, the Greek letters representing the Elevator and Maintenance Society. I had joined a social fraternity, but when Jean said that yes, she'd like to have my fraternity pin, I gave her the one I

Cleveland College was an American version of English working-class colleges; the building in which it was housed, shown here in 1942, was razed after World War II.

valued far more: the society's pin with the image of a mop in a bucket embossed in silver-colored metal.

I don't know if Joe himself was unwilling to do it, or if the other full-time custodians had refused, but he chose me—so much younger, and hence slimmer and more limber than the others—as the most capable janitor for a special task. The thousands of pigeons that lived on Public Square roosted at night on the surrounding buildings. Many of them roosted on the fifth-floor ledge of Cleveland College. The art studio was on that floor, and the art teachers and their students were bothered by the stench of pigeon droppings on the ledge whenever the windows were opened because of heat or paint fumes. My assignment was to climb out one of the windows to scrape the accumulated layers of guano off of about 40 feet of the ledge.

Joe and I arrived at the studio door to discover that an unscheduled class was in session. Fortunately, the door was at the rear, and the studio was a large room. Since the students at their easels were gathered in a semicircle at the front, Joe decided our work wouldn't disturb them. And so we entered, bearing our equipment—a scraper, a brush, a pan, and a metal pail—Joe leading me by the heavy rope he had tied to my waist as a safety precaution. From the doorway, we hadn't seen the young woman the students were sketching. Standing on a platform, one arm on the back of a chair, she was the first nude female I'd ever seen. Were her breasts and the rest of her immaculate body really gleaming in the blue spotlights I continue to carry in my memory, or is that blue glow my subjective response to what I saw?

Though I resolutely turned to the task at hand, I was seeing that glow as I stepped out the window onto the ledge. Joe handed me the scraper, brush, and pan once I kneeled outside. With that vision blinding me to all else, I felt no fear, though I doubt that Joe, playing out the rope as I advanced, would have been able to support my weight if I'd fallen from the edge. Each time I filled the pan, I returned it to Joe at the open window to dump the dirt into the bucket. So I could have looked at the model again and again, but I didn't. To see her once was a gift granted me by chance; I was no furtive peeping Tom. By the time Joe and I had finished, the modeling session was over.

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The generations of undergraduates I taught at Cornell in the second half of the last century would have been amused, I imagine, to hear that at their age their professor's first view of a naked woman enabled him to clean pigeon droppings from a high ledge of a college building without the slightest fear of plunging to his death. But most of the students of my pre–World War II generation were less knowledgeable about sexual matters than any of those I taught, and I was more innocent than almost all of my peers. My first awareness of the changes brought by puberty came to me in Fort Smith, Arkansas, soon after my 12th birthday, as I was running up the steps of the junior high school shortly before noon on a Saturday morning, a miniature replica of a triceratops dinosaur in my hand. I had finished sculpting it at home, from a large bar of soap, and I was proud of my entry for a contest sponsored in public school art classes by the manufacturers of Ivory soap. Was it the friction from my pants (actually, the corduroy knickers worn by almost every schoolboy in those days) that aroused my penis, or something about the pleasure of my accomplishment—or is there possibly an unconscious erotic element in the continuing appeal of dinosaurs to nearly all children? The unexpected bulge in my pants so astonished and embarrassed me that I sat down on a step, missing the deadline for contest entries, extended to Saturday at noon for careful sculptors like me: while I sat there, immobilized, I heard the door being locked behind my back.

I NEVER HAD DEVELOPED anything but transitory friendships, and so lacked the comradeship with other boys that permits an exchange of sexual anecdotes and dubious information.

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By the time I entered the ninth grade, I was attending a junior high in Lakewood, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland. Now in my mid-80s, I've forgotten the names of my other ninth-grade teachers, but whenever I come across references to the only game bird I've been willing to eat (in Portugal, with fig sauce; it was delicious), I remember Mr. Partridge, who taught a class in elementary science. That his name remains so firmly in my mind is a consequence of a single sentence of his. For, on the day that he was especially angered by the snickers of other boys—who found sexual innuendoes in nearly all of his scientific references—Mr. Partridge did me the disservice of singling me out for praise: "Jimmy McConkey," he said, "is the only boy in this class who doesn't have a dirty mind!" The reason that I didn't, though, is that my ever-restless father, always in search of ideal employment beyond his grasp, had moved his family so often—at least once every year—that I never had developed anything but transitory friendships, and so lacked the comradeship with other boys that permits an exchange of sexual anecdotes

and dubious information. After school let out a day or two later, another boy in the science class, maybe out of pity for my ignorance, whispered in my ear a dirty story simple and graphic enough for my understanding—the only crude joke I've been unable to forget, which suggests that seven decades later I still carry some of the burden of my youthful innocence.

And yet, ever since a beautiful nude model made me fearless on a two-foot-wide ledge, I've rarely been visited by the terror that high places can bring to most rational people. In addition to my janitorial work, I served as a guard in the locked and empty building on Sundays, which gave me uninterrupted hours for studying. My chief responsibility was to take down the flag at sunset from its mast on the flat roof above the seventh floor; and every Sunday I tested my newfound courage by looking down from the edge at the little people waiting for the yellow toylike streetcars.

It's possible, too, that the attraction of heights—of a removal from the daily distractions of life—is part of my genetic heritage. One of my first memories of my father is of his swooping down in an airplane over our house in a Milwaukee suburb and waving to me, my older brother, and my mother from the open cockpit of an airplane. With a World War I pilot, he once owned a dozen Spads and Nieuports, cannibalizing parts from 10 of them to keep one of each in flying condition. During my underclass years at Cleveland College, my brother, Jack, was an aeronautical engineer for an aircraft manufacturer in Baltimore. In the summer after I'd removed pigeon droppings from the ledge, he invited me for a visit, saying he had a surprise for me. It turned out that his love of flying had caused him to quit his engineering job; he now was teaching acrobatic maneuvers to pilots at a small airport near Baltimore. His surprise was to demonstrate some of those maneuvers, with me as the passenger in the rear cockpit seat, where there were duplicate controls for his students.

He strapped a parachute to my body, carefully demonstrating how I should use it in an emergency, and put a leather helmet with goggles on my head after making sure I was tightly fastened by a belt to the seat. After we were high above Baltimore, he turned the plane upside down, an unusual way to view the streets and the harbor. My memory carries little of the various acrobatics we engaged in, for they all merge in my mind as a dizzying sequence; but they included steep climbs, barrel rolls, and a final power dive over the Chesapeake Bay. My trust in my brother kept me from panic. The duplicate controls moved in accordance with Jack's controls, and my major fear was that at some crucial moment my body would disobey my mind and interfere with Jack's flying of the plane. When we pulled out of that final dive, I thought I had blacked out; and after we landed I told Jack I'd gone blind, and might throw up—for now that the exhilaration was over, I realized how nauseated I was. He laughed at my distress, pulling the helmet off my head: gravity had caused the leather to cover my eyes.

I've never had the desire to be a pilot, but our oldest son, Larry, earned a commercial license many years ago; I've enjoyed flying with him in both his first plane, a single-engine Cessna, and the much speedier two-engine Cessna he later bought. No passenger needs to experience the thrill of acrobatic flying to realize the great difference between flying in a small plane and flying in, say, a Boeing 747: it's the difference that separates riding in a nimble sports car from traveling in a crowded Greyhound bus. To add to the drama, passengers in small planes may wear, as does the pilot, headphones to block out engine noise and to hear the communications between control towers and all the pilots, commercial and otherwise, in the area: weather reports from pilots about unexpected turbulence or icing conditions; warnings from the control tower of approaching aircraft; and on occasion, an appeal to the tower for information concerning their position from pilots of small planes without instrumentation who have lost their visual bearings. Meanwhile, passengers on a commercial jet try to avoid boredom by watching movies, doing crossword puzzles, or playing video games on their laptops—all the time remaining oblivious to the fact that often, because of wind currents, their giant plane is sliding at a tangent from the direction they are facing. (I became aware of this on a windy day when Jean and I were flying with our son; he pointed to a commercial jet that had passed above us, flying in the same direction as we were. Like Larry's turbo-engine twin, the Boeing jetliner maintained its assigned course by heading maybe 20 degrees away from it.)

Painting is a mindless task, giving one a chance to dream and to go back in time.

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The heights I normally ascend to are far closer to the ground than that and give none of the freedom one feels when, from the windows of a small plane, the earth is a distant mosaic of fields, towns, rivers, and cloud shadows. I make the climb by something so mundane as an extension ladder, holding in my hand either a scraper to remove flaking paint or a brush and a bucket of paint to return our house to its former immaculate whiteness. Each summer for more than 40 years I have painted one side of our 1830s Greek revival farmhouse; and sometimes, with the help of family or friends, I also painted either the carriage house—once used for horses and buggies, now for cars—or a smaller barn.

The previous owner had planted small yews at the corners of the house, and, despite my trimming, over the decades they grew ever taller and wider—which led me to place the foot of the extension ladder farther and farther from the foundation. About 10 years ago, I realized that the ladder might slip while I was painting the overhang under the roof, about 20 feet from

the ground. I was then in my mid-70s, but physically I still felt young and reckless enough to give it a try: after all, if the ladder did slip, I'd fall on the topmost supple branches of the yew, luxuriant with tender needles that had grown as a result of my last trimming. And that actually happened, but with even more fortunate results than I had foretold: after the ladder fell, not only did I bounce up and down, unhurt, as if the yew were a mattress, but—a miracle that made me twice blessed—the wire handle of my paint bucket caught on a branch, and not a drop of paint spilled.

Although I hired a backhoe operator to remove those overgrown yews, I kept up my annual house painting, without qualms, every summer up to the last one. Painting is a mindless task, giving one a chance to dream and to go back in time, and often I remember those days when—long before I put my faith in the piloting skill of my eldest son—I was trying to guard all three of our boys from harm. Their ages were 13, 10, and three the year we were in France; I had been granted a fellowship to live and write in Paris, during my first sabbatical leave from Cornell. Before returning home, we spent a month visiting other European countries in our little Volkswagen, which would accompany us on the ship we would board in Naples. During those weeks, our children kept escaping their overprotective father, to climb on the parapets of ruins or to experience the vertigo one gets from running up the interior spiral staircase of the leaning Tower of Pisa. For the first time in my life, I felt the terror of heights. I was on a mountain with them—on the rim of Mount Vesuvius—and as I was trying to keep our youngest son from squirming away from my grip, I felt a terror that centered in my testicles. And yet on the morning of the day we climbed that volcanic mountain of ashes, Jean had had to restrain me from jumping over the rail of one hotel balcony to the balcony of the adjoining room, where that youngest son—who couldn't undo the chain locks he had managed to secure on both the entrance door and the one connecting the two rooms our family needed—was sobbing. (Using fractured Italian and physical gestures, Jean was able to convey to the desk clerk and the hotel owner our predicament. Italians love all young children, and this pair delighted in splintering the door with a crowbar and seeing Jean embrace our three-year-old son.)

As St. Augustine realized about a millennium and a half ago, any entrenched activity or attitude becomes part of our personality. It was natural enough, then, that I lost my fear of heights once my family was safely back at home. But this summer some of that fear I felt on Vesuvius returned to me, though I have no children to protect. On a ladder, I so lost my sense of confidence that I hired painters to scrape, sand, and paint my house, and a carpenter to replace splintered and warped siding, another job I'd previously accomplished. One might assume, given my age, that I should have hired others for tasks like these some time ago, but I've always taken pride in my self-reliance and physical agility.

That sudden resurgence of fear has its beginnings in a custom of mine since retirement—every Wednesday I have lunch with friends at the faculty club on the Cornell campus. Their fields of expertise cover a number of the university's disciplines, and I've learned from these congenial companions that their subjects can be as rewarding and creative as literature has always been for me. Because of their contributions, some of their names are known far beyond our table. In late spring of this year, a chance remark by one member of the group—was it connected to his refusal to travel by airplane?—caused me to relate the story of my janitorial experiences as well as a few other events I've mentioned in this account. I don't know whether or not I was boasting about my lack of fear of heights, but that night I had a dream that proved I'd become far less confident in my strength and agility than I had assumed myself to be.

YOUNG MEN MAKE THE bravest soldiers, for they believe death belongs only in their distant futures. This may help account for my early insouciance to heights.

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Freudians are adept in decoding dreams like mine as expressions of sexual fears and desires that the conscious mind has repressed. It seems to me, though, that my unconscious mind often serves as a kind of guardian, warning me, through dreams, of excesses in my emotional states and behavior. Here is the dream that is the seed of these recollections, given in the manner of its unfolding: I'm trying to raise a very long extension ladder to reach an open window with a small ledge on the third floor of a brick building. The ladder is too heavy for my strength, but three young women who are passing by—they resemble some of the undergraduates I once taught—easily lift it for me, raising the two extensions higher than the window, and directly in front of it. Ignoring my request that for safety they raise the ladder next to the ledge to enable its user to grasp one of its rails while stepping onto that projecting stone, they nimbly climb the rungs, swinging like acrobats around the ladder to jump into the room behind the window. Much more cautiously, I follow them, feeling the ladder shake and bend as I ascend the narrower and flimsier extensions. As I swing around the ladder in their manner, I see they are already impatiently waiting to descend. The room is dark, small, and empty, and its entrance door locked; I never had a good reason for wanting to enter it. As I prepare to descend, the three young women are already safely down; each gives me a friendly wave before leaving me to my own resources. My hands are sweaty, and I'm terrified they might slip as I swing back onto the ladder. I do that successfully, but the trembling in my knees causes the ladder to vibrate against the bricks. The dream doesn't relinquish its terror until I am back on the ground—at

FDR: He aroused the American capacity for hope.

which point I awake, having learned my lesson.

I guess that anybody in his mid-80s who tries to behave as if he were half his age requires a cautionary dream like that; it made me aware, among other things, that I now require help not only to raise a heavy ladder but simply to carry it from one place to another. Jean and I once owned horses—we bought them when they were young and as eager as we to canter and gallop. We kept them long after they were too old for riding, until they died of ailments that eventually afflict all elderly creatures—one in her stall in the horse barn; the other, a gelding, while peacefully grazing in the pasture. Once I was able to hoist 100-pound bags of horse grain on my shoulder, but now I struggle to do the same with the 40-pound bags of dry dog food needed for an animal large enough for a child to ride.

This summer, while painters climb ladders, my wife and I have been safely below them, engaged in the laborious task of repairing, scraping, and painting the frames and innumerable louvers of 28 pairs of shutters first installed 175 years ago. (We've enjoyed working together on chores like this for 62 years, which makes me realize that the janitorial pin I gave her while we were undergraduates foretold much about our future life. She didn't appreciate, though, the birthday present I gave her a decade ago: in a hardware store, I saw an identical dset of the commercial-type mop and bucket with wooden rollers I'd used as a janitor, and on a whim bought it for her as a joke.) I've also been engaged in writing this autobiographical narrative; on occasion, a discovery occurs to me while repairing a shutter, and I desert Jean for an hour or so to return to the manuscript.

Young men make the bravest soldiers, for they believe that death belongs only in their distant futures. In addition to the reasons I have given, this one may help account for my early insouciance to heights, but nothing I've

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yet said adequately explains the longevity of my self-confidence, as I realized while working with Jean. A fuller explanation has to take into account the generation I was born into.

I've never had the desire to read the popular book that hypes Americans of my age as members of "the greatest generation." Human nature hasn't changed much over the millennia; what alters, I think, are the historical conditions that give priority to one or another of our mixed qualities.

While reading in bed a few nights ago, I found myself engrossed by a magazine article about the American response to altering historical conditions. Written by an economics historian, it presents the thesis that the democracy we accept as granted requires for its continuation sufficient prosperity to keep most people content with their lot. It uses statistics and contemporary records of our numerous economic downturns and depressions to demonstrate the erosion of belief in equality and justice in times of suffering and hardship. During such historical periods, resentment made America a fertile ground for physical violence and mass riots while exposing all the prejudices lying dormant in times of relative prosperity. The single exception to this unstable state of affairs—that famous exception proving the rule—is the Great Depression in which my generation came to maturity.

The brief article doesn't explain this anomaly, but the reasons seem obvious to me, and probably to any other member of my generation who has survived long enough to compare the present period to that one. In retrospect, I can recognize that we were innocent about more matters than sex. We were naïve about many of the racial, religious, and other prejudices that afflicted America, for we believed so much in the ideals of our country that we ignored, as did our Founders, the shortcomings in our practice of them. The relative lack of resentment during those long years of economic hardship is largely a consequence of the common knowledge that the Depression affected nearly all citizens, whether they had been rich or poor before the 1929 financial collapse; the Depression made manifest the American ideal of equality and the sense of social justice that stems from it.

Cleveland College was a microcosm, in the Midwest, of the nation's liberal idealism. It was an American version of English working-class colleges, the difference being that the adults who attended represented a cross section of our populace; and they, like the younger students on working scholarship, were full of hope for the future. (My parents, like those of most of us on scholarship, had not attended college, but it was assumed by parents and children alike that somehow we would have that privilege.) The Depression was responsible for the success of Cleveland College; the building was demolished to become a temporary parking lot after the final World War II veterans had attended classes on the GI Bill.

In this first decade of the 21st century, how can I explain to myself and to others the strong belief in a better future that most Americans shared during the Great Depression? To resort to a metaphor fitting my subject,

we may have been clustered on the bottom rungs of a ladder, but that American ladder rose into the heavens, and someday we would climb higher and higher. For professors and students alike at Cleveland College, the guiding spirit behind our idealism was clearly Franklin D. Roosevelt, and it is apparent that—from his first inaugural speech in 1932 onward—he aroused the American capacity for hope.

To freshen my memory of that inaugural address and its effect on the public, I've just looked at my copy of Samuel Eliot Morison's *Oxford History of the American People*. Though Roosevelt's words bluntly confront the immensity of the financial crisis, and demand greater presidential power to overcome it, the crucial—and most famous—sentence opens the address. To Morison, it "sounded like a trumpet call": "First of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

Morison gives two examples to illustrate the electrifying power of this speech. One is from Will Rogers, whose humor and cowboy mannerisms had made him a popular newspaper columnist. On the day following the inauguration, Rogers said in his column that "for three years" Americans haven't "been as happy as they are today. No money, no banks, no work, no nothing, but they know they got a man in there who is wise to Congress, wise to our so-called big men. The whole country is with him." The other example comes from a New Hampshire woman whom Morison met that same day; he says she came from a town that always had voted Republican. In response to his question as to what she and her fellow citizens "thought of the new president," she replied, "We feel that our country has been given back to us."

To those examples, I can add a third. My father, a Republican, may have been among the minority who voted for Herbert Hoover, but following the address he became so pleased that his middle name, like Roosevelt's, was "Delano" that he altered his pronunciation of it—like our new president, he now accented the first syllable instead of the second.

What accounts for my self-confidence over the many years in which I felt no fear of falling? I'm sure it had a major source in the words and actions of Roosevelt—as well as in all that I learned about the courage of ordinary people and the generous support they gave each other (as a child, I was a recipient of that support) during the Depression. I kept my indifference to heights long after wiser people, recognizing the limitations that the passage of time places upon all of us, became cautious. I was willing to climb tall ladders even after I saw a horrifying image and read eyewitness accounts of innocent people jumping from the fiery windows of the collapsing Manhattan towers. I regret the necessary dream that made me fearful, just as I regret the inevitable disappearance of Jean's and my alma mater—the building in which I met her and learned many things that also have enriched my life, including the skills of the janitorial trade. ❖

Glorious Dust

The posthumous masterwork of an influential black historian tells how slavery itself undermined the Confederacy

ROBERT ROPER

In the spring of 2005, when *Bitter Fruits of Bondage,* a brilliant, cogent, relatively short new book on the Civil War, saw publication, its author, Armstead L. Robinson, had been dead for 10 years. Formerly an associate professor of history at the University of Virginia, the founding director of the Carter G. Woodson Institute for Afro-American and African Studies, and the institutional godfather of black studies programs across the United States, Robinson died of a stroke at 48, overweight and overworked but not, according to those who knew him well, overwhelmed. Right up to his last days, he had been productively, expansively at work, ever deepening, enriching, and refining his magnum opus.

Robinson was that most rare historian, one who exercises a profound influence upon a field yet never in his lifetime publishes a book within it. Indeed, so seminal a figure was he in the history of the South and so legendary the book that he never quite managed to produce, that wags in the academy referred to him as "Mr. Forthcoming." By the time of his death, the book that had been rumored for nearly 20 years had entered into myth, and perhaps the kindest interpretation of its nonappearance made reference to a presumed perfectionist streak in the warm, lively, formidably curious Southern scholar. *Bitter Fruits of Bondage: The Demise of Slavery and the Collapse of the Confederacy, 1861–1865,* an account of why the Confederacy collapsed, had begun as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Rochester, where in the mid-1970s Robinson studied under the then-Marxist (now Catholic-patriarchalist) historian of slavery and the slave-owning class, Eugene D. Genovese. Or, to take a slightly longer view, it began as part of his mammoth

Robert Roper's most recent book, *Fatal Mountaineer,* a biography, won the 2002 Boardman-Tasker Prize. His novels include *Mexico Days* and *The Trespassers.* He is at work on a history of Walt Whitman's family during the Civil War.

senior thesis at Yale, where as an undergraduate Scholar of the House, he studied with C. Vann Woodward. Both his thesis and his Rochester dissertation focused on developments in the Civil War West, that vast but historiographically semi-overlooked region beyond the Appalachians and east of the Brazos, and on why and how the slave system fell apart.

Robinson had grown up there, in the Mississippi Valley. His father's family came from Mansura, Louisiana, a town of 2,000 some 200 miles upriver from New Orleans. They were black Lutherans, an exotic species in the Deep South: Armstead's father, deWitt Peter Robinson, who studied at the Emanuel Lutheran College and Seminary in Greensboro, North Carolina, became pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in New Orleans, and later of Cross of Calvary Lutheran in Memphis. The Reverend Robinson's maternal uncle and two of his brothers also became pastors; his wife, Ruth Dickinson Robinson, attended the Greensboro seminary; and two of her brothers became Lutheran pastors as well.

Armstead, born in 1947, went to Hamilton High, for many years the only high school for blacks in Memphis. There he attracted the interest of several teachers and of a local attorney, Jared Blanchard, who tried to open a few doors. He was admitted to Yale in 1964, not as one of a favored cohort benefiting from the redress of an appalling historical inequity, but as one of the mingy handful ushered into the Ivy League each year "on the merits." In his class, there were 18 African Americans out of 1,061 men admitted. Midway through his Yale career, 1966, the college graduated just six black men from an entering class of 1,024. But by 1968, and partly as the result of a determined noise raised by students like Robinson himself, Yale entered 43 black freshmen in a class of 1,025 (4 percent as compared to 1.7 percent Armstead's year).

Henry Louis Gates Jr., one of this enlarged number of black freshmen arriving in 1968, has written, "In an accident of history, our cadre of blackness arrived on the Yale campus in the same year as did the Program in Afro-American Studies. . . . Located on the fringe of the campus, a hundred yards or so from the New Haven Green, Afro-Am had been established at the insistence of, and through the sensitive planning of, a handful of . . . remarkably sophisticated" black undergraduates, Robinson prominent among them. Robinson and a few other seniors were as idols to Gates, he writes in *The Future of the Race,* a 1996 book he wrote with Cornell West.

In a historical moment that valorized angry, radical gestures, Robinson was more than sufficiently angry, yet strangely levelheaded, too, able to talk to everyone. Perhaps it was being related to all those Southern pastors—Lutherans of probity and a quiet persuasiveness. At age 20, he took a lead role in assembling at Yale a group of distinguished personages for the purpose of assessing black studies. On a weekend early in 1968, deans and provosts mingled with noted historians and sociologists, political scientists and black psychiatrists, and young men with large hair and stern expressions. Maulana Ron Karenga, founder-chairman of the group known as US, based in the Watts

Armstead Robinson at Yale in the late 1960s

community of Los Angeles, shared a podium with McGeorge Bundy, president of the Ford Foundation, and the exchanges were frank and sometimes witty.

Armstead, unlike some other young men of his time, had a grip on the earnest reality of the day, the hour, the opportunity. He would take an extra year to finish at Yale because of his involvement with black studies (his work included co-editing a book, *Black Studies in the University,* that remains a vividly readable document of the times). Perhaps because he was writing his 600-page senior thesis in the same period, a thesis that traced the consequences of small actions undertaken by obscure and unimportant people (poor blacks under Reconstruction in Shelby County, Tennessee, among other places), he developed, or further awakened to, a sense he would always have that we are all up to our ears in history, whether we see it or not. And that the future spins forth from what we do here today. The necessary reforms of Reconstruction had been smothered in their political cradle fewer than a hundred years before that weekend of symposium repartee, and, therefore, since influential people were asking him what to do, Robinson had a plan. Yes, indeed, he did.

The Yale approach—influenced as it was by administrators, students, and scholars like anthropologist Sidney Mintz and political scientist Robert Dahl—was intellectually ambitious, interdisciplinary, and internationalist. Its aim was not to favor and thereby possibly ghettoize the study of black experience, but to locate that experience within the most sweeping of New and Old World narratives. Other examples of Robinson's forethought suggest that he may have been half-aware already of what he was taking on: a lifelong headache. Possibly also a fatal heartache. The debate over black studies has never ended. As the sociologist Karen Fields, who in the 1980s and 1990s directed black studies at the University of Rochester (a program nurtured by Robinson, who served as curriculum consultant), has said, "I discovered that there is no one so junior in the academy, no department so obscure, no scholar so normally cautious and polite as not to be willing to hold forth boldly about the untenability of black studies as an idea, and about the dangers that co-hiring with it poses to academic excellence."

Ask yourself as you read this essay—you, most fair-minded reader—how you actually feel about the idea of black studies. If you are white, and if you

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have never studied in such a program or on your own read widely in African-American history, or married into or otherwise acquired an identification with the subjects of that history, I suspect that you probably harbor a suspicion that black studies is less intellectually defensible than, say, musicology. Or urban studies. Or Southeast Asian history.

Black studies is too politicized, the argument goes. It's an exercise in "identity politics." Too often its positions of leadership have been granted to nonscholars, or to semischolars who got their degrees on the cheap somehow (probably in some other black studies program). Granted, the recently retired president of Harvard was a bit out of line in some of his imputations of unscholarly behavior, but isn't it true that highly rewarded black studies notables have written lightweight or even frivolous books? Appeared often on TV? Produced rap CDs?

This indictment, which appears to serve as a default position for many good people, resembles other ideas about African-American endeavors that have proved historically embarrassing, to say the least. What really transpires in Afro-American studies programs is different. Nearly 40 years ago, as he designed an architecture for black studies that is still in place across the range of higher education today (at Yale, Harvard, Duke, and the University of Virginia; at UCLA, William and Mary, University of Houston, Antioch, and Princeton, to name a few of the institutions where he consulted), Robinson was too possessed of the particular *moment* to speculate about how long-lived the suspicion of his new idea would be. The important thing was to get the ball rolling. Lay out the foundation stones, in an intelligent and attractive pattern. Begin. Yale became the first major university to offer a degree-granting program in African-American studies, and Robinson had been an indispensable part of that work. Few students concerned for reform in the 1960s could say as much.

Bitter Fruits of Bondage shows few signs of its prolonged gestation. Although a number of scholars and editors had a hand in the project, helping to shape the manuscript of more than 1,200 pages that Armstead's widow, Mildred W. Robinson, a law professor at the University of Virginia, delivered to the university press a few months after his death, there is a seamlessness and a potent coherence to the narrative. It begins in full stride:

> Recently I delivered a lecture on the rise and demise of the Confederacy at the shrine of the "Lost Cause," the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia. Given the topic, my affiliation with the University of Virginia history department, and the similarity between my first name and the surname of a quite prominent clan of the First Families of Virginia, the Armisteds, this particular lecture attracted a much larger than usual gathering of Civil War buffs. . . . Many of my audience . . . no doubt expected . . . an updated version of the prevailing orthodoxy about the war. But the

> version of "The War" I presented bore little relationship to the traditional account. My thesis was that Southern defensiveness about slavery had precipitated the war and that Confederates were defeated because, in the end, white Southerners had lacked the will to go on.

The prevailing orthodoxy that Robinson invokes is a version of events familiar to anyone who has read any of the major works of Southern history published in the last 140 years. Basically, the idea is that the Confederacy, despite brilliant generals (mostly in the Virginia theater) and a populace on fire with newly minted Southern nationalism (such that, over the war's course, 75 to 85 percent of the white male population served—the comparable figure for the North is 50 percent), could never have triumphed. Northern advantages in manpower and productive capacity were simply too great. Yet, on the strength of that fierce nationalism, and by dint of a willingness to suffer and die at high rates—roughly one in three Southern soldiers perished, compared to one in six men in blue—the South persisted for an unthinkable four years.

To this account, Robinson makes a tart rejoinder: the Civil War was not, technically, a civil war at all. Civil wars are fought for control or "for redress of regional issues within [a] preexisting framework." The South did not aim to control the territorial United States, to replace Lincoln and his government; it aimed for independence and a sundering of that territorial unity. Secession was for the purpose of creating a new nation-state—one that enshrined slavery, it goes without saying.

As a war of national liberation, then, the rebellion was short-lived and in some ways quite paltry. Wars of independence are almost always fought against larger, more powerful adversaries. Consider the American Revolution, which lasted seven years and seemed utterly hopeless at points, or the Dutch revolution against the Spanish, an 80-year struggle (1568–1648) that involved horrific reprisals against a population fighting desperately on its home ground. The Dutch, like other peoples seeking freedom, were simply not to be bested in the lands where they lived.

A "sense of inevitability pervades Civil War studies," Robinson wrote, yet there was nothing inevitable about the outcome of the war. Neither the presumed moral rightness of the Union effort, which came to include emancipation, nor Southern industrial underdevelopment was determinative. For that matter, the agrarian South "reconfigured its weak industrial sector for wartime with surprising facility," and the South was in some ways enormously wealthy. The international trade in cotton, with the American raw product favored by textile manufacturers in the North and overseas, gave Confederate policymakers an inflated idea of King Cotton's power to dictate outcomes—to frighten foreign governments, for example, into recognition of Southern independence.

Slavery, the cornerstone of Southern wealth, conferred a great advantage,

at least on paper—the huge reservoir of black manpower freed Southern whites to report for military service at the aforementioned rate of around 80 percent. (Fifty percent of eligible whites volunteered in the first summer of the war, a sign that, at least at the beginning, intense national feeling animated the South.) But the Southern cornerstone would prove a "millstone," Robinson says. Slaves made up 40 percent of the Southern population. Southern propagandists wrote fulsomely of the loyalty of slaves, but intense anxiety over possible slave rebellions exercised the planter class and the Confederate political elite that served it. Right from the start, Southern governors defied requisition orders from the government in Richmond; thus, for example, the governor of Arkansas, Henry M. Rector, refused to hand over thousands of weapons seized in 1861 from a federal arsenal at Little Rock and instead distributed them to home-defense units.

SOUTHERN YEOMEN, who did most of the fighting and dying, recognized early on that they were suffering in a cause in which they had, technically, scant economic interest.

The signal Southern victory at First Bull Run on July 21, 1861, only 30 miles outside Washington, might have had an even more profound impact on the course of the war had Southern generals commanded reserve troops with which to march on the capital. Jefferson Davis, present at the battle, urged his commanders to do just that, but they could not: home-front defense had drained the Rebel army of thousands of men and weapons. Indeed, early in the war, "the [Southern] states, collectively, possessed twice as many guns as the Richmond government," Robinson writes.

What can only be called planter-class perfidy—carefully documented by Robinson in his sober, judicious, but colorful account of the war in the West—deepens the picture of the Confederacy as a system at war with itself. Confederate efforts to build defenses were undercut by planters' refusal to send slaves to work on roads and battlements; slaves were too valuable, as workers and commodities, to risk. Meanwhile, when owners did supply slaves, Southern soldiers often refused to work alongside them. It needs to be remembered, Robinson tells us, that slave ownership was highly skewed both geographically and socioeconomically. There was a Black Belt in the Deep South, suited to plantation-style agriculture and, by the 1850s, almost wholly devoted to cotton production, and then there was a large subsistence sector, comprising millions of acres of mostly upcountry terrain. Slave owning was rare there. The plantation elite, those who owned more than 20 slaves plus substantial land, made up less than 3 percent of the free Southern population. Southern yeomen,

who did most of the fighting and dying, recognized early on that they were suffering in a cause in which they had, technically, scant economic interest.

By the spring of 1862, with passage of the Southern conscription act, the watchword for these yeomen became "A rich man's war and a poor man's fight." The notorious act of April 16 of that year instituted compulsory service for all white men between the ages of 18 and 35. Whole regiments were summarily reenrolled for a period of three years or the war's duration. Yet, planters owning 20 slaves or more were made exempt a few months later. Fear of slave rebellion remaining high, overseers also were exempted, and anyone able to provide a living, breathing substitute might do so; in effect, this allowed the planters, as well as other persons of means, not to serve at all.

Many did serve, of course, displaying great valor. But over the next two years, at least 50,000 Southern gentlemen bought their way out of service. At the same time, the Union blockade was coming into strong effect, and Confederate leaders campaigned to persuade Southern farmers to plant foodstuffs (mostly corn) instead of cotton. "But noblesse oblige did not overcome . . . individualism among the planters," Robinson discovered, and "the fabulous prices offered for cotton in the wake of embargo and the blockade induced a number to plant more cotton and less food."

Eventually, "Excessive production of staple crops like cotton and underproduction of food crops combined to produce a subsistence crisis, the very sort of disaster that . . . draft substitution and exemption for plantation managers [were] intended to prevent. When news about the lack of food at home reached the camps, many yeoman soldiers went home, with or without official leavetaking."

Mildred Robinson, Armstead's third wife, whom he married in 1987, recalls getting to know the still youthful professor:

> [H]is command of his field [was] forever impressed upon me when roughly 18 months after we met, he regaled me during a drive from Memphis to Atlanta for eight enthralling hours with a detailed history of the region through which we were passing. His presentation included topography, demographics, resident socioeconomic descriptions, and extensive descriptions of the conditions of battle including such things as the number of foot soldiers, how much cavalry, who had what arms, where the critical [gun emplacements] were, what the weather was like, what the crop conditions were like, the status of slave activity, and so forth. He embellished his presentation with the stories [of slaves and other locals]. . . . It was quite astonishing. These anecdotes recalled from diaries, letters, newspapers and other writings of the period, information [from his] archival research in the Library of Congress and in state libraries across the South [constituted an] intuitive force and . . . made history come alive for me in a way that had never been true before. In essence, he presented his book to me during that drive.

They were traveling through *his* terrain: the lands west and south of the Appalachians, along the line of advance that Sherman, after the great victories in the West, would follow in the opening to the last, terrible act of the war. Perhaps no American has ever belonged to a region of a country, and to a bloody history, more intrinsically and more authentically than Robinson at that time, when, according to Mildred Robinson, he had pretty much completed his legendary archival researches:

> [A]s was his style from the Scholar of the House Project forward, he sought to research the project to the bottom. In other words, if he had a pile of papers, he never considered himself finished until he got to the last paper in the file. . . . He spent several summers in the stacks at the National Archives working his way through the record of Continental Army Commands. . . . He came away with stories about Sherman. When he came into the Army [Sherman] was sent to Kentucky and as he scanned the amount of resistance he was facing, he wrote a series of reports in August of 1861. He wrote that it would take four or five years and probably two million men in the Army before the North could subdue the South. When they got this, the people in Washington thought he was suffering from combat fatigue. They said, "He's become mentally unbalanced from the strain of the work, he must be relieved," and that's what they did. They relieved him . . . sent him back to Saint Louis to cool out.

The terrain and the story belonged to Robinson not because he was a black man, although surely that didn't hurt. Who he was, where he came from, and what he and his family had needed to do to succeed surely had sensitized him to the likelihood that 10 generations of black people walking and working this land, inhabiting it in the millions, must have amounted to something. Must have had a telling impact on virtually everything. Nor did the terrain and the story belong to him because he was a Southerner, although, again, that also didn't hurt—he, too, thrilled to tales of martial courage, knew the purely military history down to the last minié ball, and fortunately had come of age when, as Barbara Fields, a historian at Columbia, has written, "Jim Crow was dead (at least as a legally sanctioned regime) [and] it became possible to be both Afro-American and Southern without a disabling sense of irony or paradox in the combination."

No, the world that they were traveling through belonged to Robinson because he had pretty much put it all together. The story lived in him as vividly and multifariously as it had ever lived in anyone else (speaking now of the history of the collapse, not of the entire war), and, manifestly, he could bring it forth. During that memorable ride, he courted his future wife by speaking history to her, history, that most romantic of tongues, for eight hours straight.

At the National Archives, he was fortunate and charming enough to win

the favor of Sarah Dunlap Jackson (1919-1991), a legendary guardian of the deepest of deep Civil War records. Jackson, a graduate of Johnson C. Smith College, of Charlotte, North Carolina, officially no more than an archival assistant, had read her way through most of what she guarded and had helped organize it, including the massive holdings of the War Department, Adjutant General's Office, Freedmen's Bureau, and Bureau of Colored Troops records. With a mind and a background not unlike Robinson's own, but of a generation and gender denied his opportunities, she had made herself into "one of the [most] knowledgeable historians of American life," according to Ira Berlin, a scholar of slavery at the University of Maryland. Jackson must have liked Armstead's research style: omnivorous, thorough, catholic.

Armstead Robinson, who died in 1995, thrilled to tales of martial courage and knew military history down to the last minié ball.

The story of the Confederate collapse was fundamentally a story of slavery, of contradictions within the institution itself. This was Robinson's great discovery, although, as he admitted freely, it was not entirely his: other scholars had beaten him to it. Charles Harris Wesley, one of the triumvirate of foundational black intellectuals from earlier in the 20th century (the other two being Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Du Bois), wrote a monograph, "The Collapse of the Confederacy," while still a graduate student at Harvard in the early 1920s. Herein are to be found most of the concepts developed at more length and with a transforming richness of detail in *Bitter Fruits of Bondage:* that struggles for national liberation elsewhere have been far more tenacious; that "states' rights" meant, once Jefferson Davis's government took office, renegade governors working at odds with the national purpose; that desertions were substantial among the yeomen soldiers and they even had a peace movement; that speculation, and the refusal to foreswear cotton profits, poisoned national feeling.

Wesley, who was not allowed to present his paper as a dissertation at Harvard (one of his thesis readers, Albert Hart, told him, "I won't hear it, it can't be done"), paid some attention to the problems that the presence of a population of free Negroes represented for Southern authorities. But the desta-

COURTESY OF MILDRED ROBINSON

bilizing influence of the *enslaved* population—those millions who might abscond, rebel, slaughter the plantation mistress in her bed—had to wait several decades for a scholar able to see what had hardly been hidden at all. Armstead's deep familiarity with the correspondence among Southern leaders—Davis to his generals and vice versa, Southern governors and senators to each other and to their wives—suggested to him the dimensions of the problem, simply by how often and with what concern they referred to it. But his discoveries on the other side of the divide, among the enslaved themselves, were most illuminating:

"[N]either Lincoln nor Davis could prevent slavery from emerging as the dominant issue in a prolonged war," he wrote. "The slaves did not rise as a body or in insurrections, but Confederate measures to forestall revolt had taken a heavy toll on Southern resources."

"Slaves listened to conversations among whites, purloined newspapers and letters, and shared what they learned through the slave grapevine. The more loudly their masters and mistresses criticized [Lincoln and his policies], the more they saw him as their best hope for freedom." As a slave, Dora Franks would recall after the war, "I think Abe Lincoln was next to the Lord. He done all he could for the slaves. . . . People in the South knowed they'd lose their slaves when he was elected president."

In other words, the outcome was in the air quite early. An alertness to the possibilities of the situation seems to have arisen generally among the slaves. "Runaway slaves had been seeking freedom in Northern encampments [from the very beginning of the war]," Robinson writes, "and wherever the Yankees went they attracted a large number of younger slaves, most of them men determined to claim the freedom they believed Union armies had brought with them." When Federal forces approached a locale, or were merely rumored to be approaching, slave discipline quickly dissolved, slaves began to flee, and plantation owners often found it necessary to abscond as well, taking those of their human chattels they were still able to compel.

Hundreds of thousands made their way across the Union lines. Two hundred thousand black men bore arms for the North, but slaves contributed materially in other ways too. In Grant's prolonged campaign to take the sturdy citadel of Vicksburg, for example—"one of the stellar campaigns in all military history," Robinson argues—escaped slaves provided what would now be called actionable intelligence that proved important. Robinson, quoting Grant: "A negro man came in who informed me . . . that a good landing [for the Union army's crossing of the Mississippi] would be found at Bruinsburg, from which point there was a good road leading to Port Gibson some 12 miles in the interior. The information was found correct, and our landing was effected without opposition."

"Grant could move with the assurance of a native defending his home soil," Robinson says, "because black and white Southerners shared their inti-

mate knowledge of local terrain with him. Such information enabled him to adopt the kind of tactics employed so successfully by Lee and Jackson in the Virginia theater, dividing his forces to make long sweeping runs around the enemy. Grant seized on this advantage to gain an element of tactical surprise he never relinquished."

The Southern cornerstone—slavery—the engine of wealth and the centerpiece of "our Southern way of life," as Confederate writers called it, proved to be what the defeat was about, let alone the initial sectional conflict. Lines of social fracture widened as an unrepresentative government beholden to a planter aristocracy ruled in a manner protective of the interests of that minority of wealth and at the expense of other classes. Catastrophic Southern reversals in the field, as in the wholesale rout at Missionary Ridge on November 25, 1863, had everything to do with high rates of desertion among the yeomanry and with their widespread disaffection from the planter-government.

Robinson's analysis of the contradictions within Southern society and the slave economy amounts to a kind of Marxist analysis without rhetorical agenda. One sees the influence of the kind of sophisticated assessment of class interests encountered in the work of British historian E. P. Thompson. But even more, one recognizes the native strain of the new social history: coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s, Robinson naturally assimilated himself into the fractious but dynamic school of historians centered in those years at the University of Rochester. Eugene Genovese, Herbert Gutman, Stanley Engerman, and others looked to tell the story of slavery and Southern society in vastly greater detail. "Early practitioners [of social history] strove to demonstrate the influence of ordinary people on the historical process," writes Joseph Reidy, a professor at Howard and one of Robinson's close colleagues. "They emphasized the process of class conflict both as a major motive force in history and as a means of examining the role" of ordinary people, not just generals and presidents.

Thus, his picture of what the yeomen soldiers were feeling and experiencing as the war went on depends largely on their own words, as for example in Robinson's report of what one Amos Ginn, who came from a nonslaveholding family in swamp country near Beaufort City, South Carolina, said after the war:

> He had found himself in the army after "three Confederate soldiers in uniforms with guns came to my father's house and took me and my brother off. . . . I did not desert because I did not want to bring trouble on myself and my people at home." He searched for another method of escaping service and found it when he allowed himself to be captured [at Missionary Ridge]. . . . "I was glad I was in good hands [he told his captors] and never had wanted to fight against them."

There is both an intimacy in Robinson's work—the product of his reading of countless letters, diaries, and other most personal documents—as well as a bracing largeness of ambition and comprehension. His is not the style of exhaustively astute studies of a single squad of left-handed Alabama artillerymen in the Battle of Feebleman's Gap. No, Robinson wanted to answer the largest, most central of Civil War questions: Why did the Confederacy, which fought so brilliantly so often, and with such reckless courage, not persevere? And what about slavery—what structural role did it play as the South put itself on a war footing? Thus, even as an undergraduate at Yale, he was writing expansively, seeking to embrace the complex Civil War reality in 600-page armfuls. He wrote and worked as a 20-year-old as if he had no time to spare (although, paradoxically, plenty of time to publish).

In his urgency and in the size of his ambition, Robinson recalls other historiographical traditions as well, for example, that of Progressives Charles Beard and Frederick Jackson Turner, who also focused on social conflict and oppressed groups. He learned from some of the best, most dynamic white historians of his era, but probably his most immediate intellectual affiliation is with Wesley and Du Bois. Their insights were often also his own, and he was excited (one suspects) to discover how true and resonant were the insights of these black forebears: that the story of those "lost to history" is decidedly not lost, given good archival work; that the full story of black people in America during the 19th century fails to separate itself, to divide from all the rest.

In this way, his career-long, sometimes Herculean efforts to seed the American academy with black studies departments appears self-serving. To tell the story right required ideas and tools from many disciplines; to tell the story of what might be called *not*-black studies, that of the Confederacy, of our native-born nationalism based on white supremacy, required an intimate encounter with enslaved black folk above all else. As Barbara Fields has written, Robinson's lifework as both institution builder and historian

> required that longstanding conventions of racecraft in the American academy be overturned, conventions that regarded Afro-Americans as a unicellular organism floating beyond the main currents of national and international affairs, an exception to history rather than a part of it. Afro-American studies, as Armstead came to conceive it, thus challenged . . . the common sense of the academy . . . the automatic relegation of anything touching on Afro-Americans to an institutional back room where resources and respect were in equally short supply.

He located his subject not in that dusty back room, whose door might be closed again some day, but spread throughout the whole mad, bloodied, beloved American mansion. ❖

Fired

Can a friendship really end for no good reason?

EMILY BERNARD

On a Saturday morning at 10:00 a.m., Beverly and I planned a trip to Long Island, just us girls, to celebrate my upcoming marriage. By that evening, Beverly and I were no longer friends. But I didn't know that yet. At 7:00 p.m. I was sure there had been some mistake, some misunderstanding, some bizarre but absolutely explainable crossing of wires—she hadn't gotten my messages, she had fallen into bed with some new boy, she had been kidnapped. I would continue to turn various scenarios over in my head for the next several months until finally I had to accept the truth—I had been fired.

Fired described anything or anyone Beverly could no longer tolerate. Other friends of mine use the word *tired* to describe what they find tedious. To be fired is much worse. Something "tired" is wearisome but tolerable if the occasion calls for it. Something "fired" is beneath contempt. In Beverly's lexicon there was only one thing worse than being fired, and that was being *so* fired.

Perhaps her cold, bureaucratic language should have warned me that Beverly would charge through our friendship with the take-no-prisoners attitude of a corporate downsizer. Even in the dismal state of the current corporate climate, euphemisms are employed to indicate the end of a career. Workers are laid off, let go, granted extended vacations. Only Donald Trump and other actors bark "You're fired!" at their employees. When Beverly fired me, it was not as if I came to work and the locks had been changed or someone else was sitting at my desk. It was as if I came to work and work wasn't there anymore.

Seven years later, I still mourn the loss of this friendship. I may never discover what happened to turn Beverly away from me, but I have learned something else: mourning the loss of a friendship elicits little sympathy from others. In our culture, it seems, friendships are generally considered to be

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incidental—garnishes on the plate of *important* relationships, like those between family members and spouses. There are no institutions, no common rituals to support either the initiation or termination of bonds between friends. Because I take my friendships as seriously as I do my marriage, I put together an anthology of writings about friendships, specifically interracial ones. At this point, it might be helpful for me to say that Beverly is white and I am black. This fact has nothing to do with why Beverly and I are no longer friends, even though I often pretend that it does. "You know how hard it is," I sigh when people ask me why Beverly and I are not friends anymore. I do this to spare myself and others the shameful truth, which is that Beverly dumped me. This is a fact more meaningful than our racial difference could ever be.

For a friendship that ended so recklessly, it had begun very carefully. Beverly (not her real name) was a student in the first class I ever taught—a section of a lecture course on 19th-century American literature. The first day of class, Beverly slumped down in her seat and stared past me. I took in the creamy red hair, the dull blue eyes, the turquoise sandals, and emerald toenails. She had a round, chubby face and long, muscular calves. Angry guitar chords floated around her as she walked in; Liz Phair, it turned out. Her mind was on other things besides 19th-century American literature. I would later learn what they were: her looks, which mostly displeased her; her family, always in some state of chaos; her future; a man who didn't want her, but should have; her friendships, shifting seismically as she approached her last year of college. I recognized this girl; she was someone I had been.

Looking at her slumped in her seat like that, I pegged Beverly as apathetic, and I was partly right. Still, what she accomplished without sweat was miles beyond what anyone else her age was capable of—at least anyone I knew. Her writing was stylish, enlivening, fearless. I was intimidated; she was benevolent. Beverly appeared to be amused by my attempts to behave like a grownup, but she generously helped me uphold the ruse.

At the end of the semester, I saw Beverly at a bar where graduate students hung out. She was the youngest, smartest, most interesting person at the table. Right next to her, I would later learn, sat the man who didn't want her, but should have. Beverly looked at me and said, "Should we start being friends now, or should I take your class first?" I had just found out that I would be teaching my very own seminar the following semester. That these words constituted the first personal exchange between Beverly and me did not feel strange. "Take my class," I said. "We have the rest of our lives to be friends."

She took the class. We were faithful to the boundaries prescribed by our respective roles until the day I handed in her final grade (an A). The next day, or very soon after that, we began a routine of hours-long phone calls, copious e-mails, and ponderous discussions during extensive walks. This routine continued for six years. Beverly could imitate anyone. She so accurately mimicked the voices and verbal tics of others that when I met the people in

her stories, I had to keep my jaw from literally hitting the floor. Nothing could make Beverly laugh harder than to have someone say to her, "My jaw *literally* hit the floor." She loved language, and she delighted in the linguistic foibles of everyday speech. She constantly crafted and revised her own idiom. "This weather is beyond fired," she said as we looked out of her apartment window during a snowstorm. I nodded, giddy to be with her, eager for whatever she would say next.

I moved to Brooklyn, but Beverly and I still talked all the time. We watched the first season of *Big Brother* and at least one *Real World* marathon together on the phone. Early on, when I was dating someone I really liked, he and I set Beverly up with a friend of his, and that established a precedent. We played central roles in each other's romantic life, and she counseled me through numerous romantic disappointments. Years later, when I introduced her to the man who would become my husband, she made the pivotal observation, "I've never seen you be so much yourself with someone." When my husband met her, he used words like "exquisite" and "charming." He could see the rare jewel that she was, and that made me fall in love with him a little bit more.

"You're not afraid of anything," I blurted, feeling very much the child of the sleepy, suburban streets of Nashville, Tennessee, where I grew up. Beverly grew up in Manhattan, and her language and confidence seemed like the realization of my teenage fantasies about citizens of New York City.

....

Beverly was several years younger than I was, but I looked up to her. Once, as I sat in the passenger seat of her father's decaying blue Volvo, she passionately expounded on the parallels between the movie *Jerry Maguire* and the Horatio Alger myth, while deftly weaving in and out of rush-hour Manhattan traffic. "You're not afraid of anything," I blurted, feeling very much the child of the sleepy, suburban streets of Nashville, Tennessee, where I grew up. Beverly grew up in Manhattan, and her language and confidence seemed like the realization of my teenage fantasies about citizens of New York City. Maybe she became bored and alienated by how often I was awestruck by things about her that she considered utterly mundane.

I was not the first person Beverly fired. Earlier there had been a close friend in college whom Beverly suddenly and violently deemed her nemesis. Then, there was a co-worker who was one day an intimate and the next someone Beverly could no longer tolerate. Her reasons for rejecting her college friend seemed shaky to me, but her treatment of her co-worker I found

chilling. Without explanation, Beverly stopped returning her phone calls and never opened a letter the woman sent her right after the phone calls ceased. Beverly was never particularly forgiving, but now she was trying on outright viciousness like a slick new suit. She would grow out of it, I thought.

I believed I was immune to Beverly's caprice. Like me, she had early on experienced ruptures in her most intimate relationships. Like her, I understood the irresistible, resonating power of silence. I learned about the power of silence where many people do: at home. In my family, feuds always ended in silence. Each and every argument clambered recklessly to a crescendo whose denouement was always the silent treatment. You knew in the fight that you had gone too far, but maybe you had actually gone somewhere even beyond that. You waited out the silence in fear that you would never be spoken to again. The fear was as terrifying as it was thrilling, like a roller coaster ride, only not nearly as safe.

At some point I developed an addiction to these sensations. For this reason, among others, I married a forgiving, even-tempered man who does not hold grudges. Before I met my husband, I nursed a serious crush on Jasper, a handsome postdoc from the Caribbean. We met through a mutual friend at about the same time I met Beverly. Jasper was worldly and vivacious and at times capable of a surprising sweetness. Jasper and our mutual friend, Steve, decided to share an apartment. Several weeks later Jasper kicked Steve out and never spoke a word to him again. He detailed his complaints about Steve, but none of them, I thought, justified such a radical act. Still, I believed Jasper when he looked me in the eye and assured me that he would never treat me that way. I was mistaken.

My experience with Jasper taught me two things. One: even minor relationships can end in ways that are devastating. Two: at the moment when someone makes the promise that he will never, ever betray you—particularly when you can see the carcasses of multiple, rashly aborted relationships right behind him—at that very moment, you should consider yourself betrayed.

Marriage to a compassionate man has encouraged me to rethink much of my own hasty behavior in past friendships. Not long ago I got back in touch with Jack, a white man who was once a close friend. We met in college and decided to attend the same graduate school. We found apartments within walking distance of each other. On most evenings one of us called the other and asked, "What are we doing for dinner tonight?"

I dumped Jack about a year into graduate school when I befriended several women with leftist convictions and feminist politics that I determined to adopt as my own. Jack was a good old boy who had a penchant for off-color jokes and impolite observations. I did as well, but I did not think these aspects of my personality would appeal to my new friends. So I put them in a grave alongside my friendship with Jack and sealed it.

I continue to be humbled by how easily Jack allows me back into his life after all these years. We have picked up as if my bad behavior never took

place. When he expresses regret about how we "fell out of touch," I am too ashamed to confess that I dumped him deliberately and that I did so because one day I decided that he looked nothing like the person I was trying to become, and I resolved not to forgive him for that.

Beverly and I were friends for six years. In the last months of our friendship, I saw her go through the most remarkable transformation I have ever witnessed. First, she shed so many pounds that even my typically circumspect husband told her that he thought she was too thin. In truth, she was no thinner than any other conventionally attractive young woman out there, and I believed that was exactly what she was going for. She had chucked the weight as well as all the vestiges of eccentricity in her wardrobe. When she looked in the mirror, she used unforgiving words to describe her body and acted annoyed when I told her she was wrong. She began to lead a fabulous big-city life—the kind of life she used to mock, and she seemed to have buried her ironic distance from it. I sensed that she had lost the ability to laugh at herself altogether. She began to fantasize out loud about enhancement cosmetic surgery. It was around this time that she dumped her co-worker. She started dating a man she described as beautiful but dumb. I listened to her stories and pretended to understand whatever was happening. I thought if I just waited out this phase, she would come back to me. She said that the new man was not only dumb but also possibly racist. But he was beautiful. His teeth were perfect.

When a friendship ends between two people of different races, it is easy to point to race as the reason. It is easy, and it is misleading, as race itself is often misleading.

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Beverly and I met at the opening of a friend's restaurant. I introduced her to two elegant, stately black women I considered role models. Beverly had heard me talk about them often, and I was pleased to have an occasion to introduce her to them. When I did, she pasted two index fingers together and pointed them at the women like a pistol. She said, "Okay, so which is which?"

The openness drained from the faces of the women. I admired them so, and here I was bringing such rudeness, like the rotting carcass of a rat, right to their doorstep. I hated Beverly for a moment, but the moment passed. I knew she was nervous, nothing more. I steered her away, as quickly as I could, and later I apologized to the women, who graciously waved away my words of regret.

Sometimes I tell this story when people ask, "Who was that girl you used to hang around with? What happened to her?" Depending on my audience, I tell this story as a tale about racial difference, about the unbridgeable gap between black and white.

"You know how it goes," I say in conclusion. Sometimes I embellish the story, and make Beverly look more or less obnoxious, depending on my mood. But if Beverly hadn't dumped me, I would never have repeated this story to anyone, certainly not here.

What I have come to believe about interracial friendships is this: when a friendship ends between two people of different races, it is easy to point to race as the reason. It is easy, and it is misleading, as race itself is often misleading. I know that I hold on to the memory of that unfortunate moment because it puzzled and troubled me, but I also hold on to it because it is a convenient fixture on which to hang the pain and anger I feel about the fact that Beverly dumped me. This memory, like most memories, is as meaningful as it is meaningless.

Beverly and I talked honestly about race; it was part of the glue that bonded us. I loved her, in part, because she was not the kind of white person who saw race as the most significant aspect of an interracial friendship. She was also not the kind of white person who looked at black and white people and saw no difference. Beverly loved black cultural style for what was curious, appealing, and, to her, *different* about it. But she also saw me, too, for who I was, both within and beyond my racial identity.

"Membership has its privileges," I say when I walk down the street with a friend and exchange a nod or a greeting with a black stranger. Beverly had a black friend at her prep school who said this to her when she once asked the friend why she had nodded hello to a black stranger. I loved that Beverly noticed that her friend had said hello to a stranger who was black, that she recognized it as a custom among the black people she knew and observed, and that she had asked her friend about it. I loved that Beverly noticed the same thing about me and said out loud to me, "Membership has its privileges," one day when she saw me greet a black stranger. I loved that her comment caught me so much by surprise that I stopped and faced her, and we stood there and laughed unrestrainedly as a traffic light changed, and changed again. Maybe it is strange and possibly sad to reveal how much I treasured in a white person her interest in and ease around black people, but I have found it rare enough in my life to call it significant.

I thought that the ease between us meant that Beverly and I would always be friends. I never considered that it could be otherwise, and even now this realization surprises me. I grew up around adult women who believed that men had ruined their lives. Therefore, in romance, I have always proceeded with suspicion. In friendships, I have taken risks, been vulnerable, asked to know and be known. As a result, it has been in friendship that I have learned the pleasures and dangers of intimacy: the pleasures of loving openly and recklessly; the dangers of having it end before you are ready.

Fired. In our sixth year of friendship, we met at the train station, and walked together down a New York street. She looked radiant, and I told her so. We sat in a restaurant and talked about men. I gave her advice. We

planned a trip to Long Island. She gave me keys to her apartment and told me she had not checked them. She would be in town that night, she said, so I should call her cell phone if the keys didn't work. They didn't work. I called and called. It was raining, and I left self-pitying messages on her voice mail as I waited on the wet stoop. Eventually, I called another friend who offered me his couch, and I left a final, icy message for Beverly. "Don't bother calling back," I said. I turned off my cell phone to punish her. As I went to sleep, I imagined all the cooing, apologetic messages Beverly would leave on my voice mail. I was wrong. The next day, I boarded the train and headed back to Pennsylvania where I was living. I fumed for a few days, and then called Beverly again. She never called back.

Days turned into weeks. I worried. My husband wondered if she was depressed over something else, so I left a message reminding her how much I cared about her. "I'm here for you," I said. Weeks turned into months. Back then, my husband was my fiancé, and when friends threw us an engagement party, he slipped a note inside Beverly's invitation asking her to come. She did not respond. Months before, he and Beverly had shopped together for my engagement ring.

I sent her my own note, part accusatory, part humiliated, replete with outraged pride and sorrow, but ambiguous enough, I thought, so that she would see that reconciliation was not only possible, it was what I wanted. She did not respond. I did not send her an invitation to our wedding, not because I did not want her there, but because I believed one more round of silence from her would break my heart for good. But it didn't matter, really, because my heart was broken anyway.

It has been almost seven years since I last talked to Beverly. During these years I have reassured myself with memories of all the ways Beverly was obviously trying to transform her life. Maybe the demise of our friendship was just unfortunate fallout from the battle she was waging with herself. These days I am nearly satisfied with that explanation. But there were other days, not long ago, when I would get into my car to mourn her in private, where no one could judge me for missing my friend. One night I drove during a rainstorm for hours, crying and pounding on the steering wheel, startled by the depth of my grief and grateful that the rain and darkness shielded my display from other drivers. This is true. But it is also true that, over the years, I have heard from Beverly through other people, and I am still too proud to take up her indirect invitations to get back in touch.

Seven years. Periodically I come across the evidence of our friendship: unreturned books, birthday cards, the set of faulty keys. Then there are the memories that surface without invitation: sure hands on the steering wheel of a decaying blue Volvo; a cloud of guitar chords around a head of creamy red hair; a membership with privileges; two fingers pointed like a pistol.

I miss it all. ❖

Fiction

Wheeling

By Ann Beattie

On Friday I went to the doctor's office and was weighed for the second time in four days. "You weighed me on Tuesday," I said to the nurse, who had azalea-pink cheeks and half-carat diamond studs in her earlobes. "Weight and blood pressure every time," she said. She gestured toward the scale. I slipped out of my shoes and stood on it. She reached around me and moved the metal digit to 150, seemed surprised when she sent the other, smaller weight down the line and saw the 150 setting was too high. She clanked it back to 100. There was a moment of Irish Airman perfect balance: my weight was 146. I stepped off the scale.

My doctor said: "Water retention from the medicine. That's why you've gained five pounds in four days. On the blood pressure, I'm going to assume it's the end of the week and traffic was bad. The medicine could affect that reading too." He picked up the blood pressure cuff, wrapped the material around my arm and pumped; as he listened through his stethoscope and the cuff slowly loosened, I remembered to breathe. The systolic had gone down. "I'm calling it 138 over 88," he said. His computer was on, and he put his thumb and first finger lightly on the mouse, like someone reaching for an unwanted hors d'oeuvre. He scrolled down. He said that the results of the second blood test were almost the same as the first. It wasn't good news, but it wasn't a death sentence either. My husband was in Cleveland on business. I hadn't mentioned that I'd be going to the doctor.

In the waiting room, I saw that the receptionist's window had been closed. I walked to the lab's small open window and deposited into the basket beneath it the order for blood work the doctor had handed me. Except for one other woman, I was the only person in the waiting room. That woman had something wrong with her neck, I saw as I was called in to have my blood drawn. I don't suppose anyone likes having that procedure; in my case, though, I often fainted, or came close to

Ann Beattie's most recent book, *Follies*, is a collection of stories.

fainting. This time, luckily, it was over quickly and I was able to walk out, faking a smile. The woman I'd seen before, slumped in an orange plastic chair, now had an ice bag behind her neck. She held a smaller one pressed against her forehead. As I walked past, she said, as a statement: "Could you do me a favor." I stopped pressing on the little ball of cotton underneath the tape on my arm and said, "Yes."

"Could you take this and throw it away?" she said, holding out a paper cup. She had crushed it into a disk; it was like being handed a melted CD.

"Sure," I said, and took it to the wastepaper basket.

"You know men can't be trusted, and I know you know that already, sister," the lab technician who hadn't stuck me called back as she swung her sweater over her shoulder. I heard no response from the other woman in the lab—the one who had drawn my blood. The joking lab technician pointed her chin toward me and winked. "Have a wonderful evening," she said toothily. She didn't make eye contact, though, and neither the woman with the ice packs nor I made any comment.

Ice Packs said: "I live in Wheeling, West Virginia. This is my fifteenth trip here. My sister's boyfriend drove me, but I don't know how I'm going to get back. He says she's coming for me, but she couldn't say goodbye to him again, so she went off before we set out and she doesn't know I'm here. I don't guess nobody knows where I am."

I wasn't sure what was wanted of me, but I took a guess. "I turned in my cell phone," I said. "I never got good reception."

She went on as if I hadn't spoken. "My mother ran off with her high school boyfriend," she said. "Left me with the mortgage. My father would work, but he's on dialysis. He don't have the strength to work. He did work. Now I'm stuck with the mortgage. I've got a brain tumor and a mortgage. They put in a shunt—" she tapped the top of her head—"skin grew around (she curved her hand through the air) and over it (she made a fist). They was going to operate on the tumor, but the doctor here said, No way. I think there's two shunts and things just grew over them like kudzu. Now I've got a migraine. My vision was all blurry, so the reception woman came back and gave me ice packs. My bottom lip's not blue, is it?"

I shook my head no.

"I'm bipolar," she said. "Something about the medicine I take, it's given me migraines. I thought I was going to get my head operated on again, but they can't do it. My father's 54 years old and he had a body shop, but now he's back and forth to the center, and I had to be in one of those places to make my recovery. I was so upset, Tim went there and he said to those guys, You hurt her, you hear from me, and he tapped the eagle head." This time she realized that I didn't understand her. "Tattoo on his neck," she said, tapping the ice pack against her own neck. "My father doesn't have a heart."

"Excuse me?" I said.

"My father doesn't know where to start. He wants to fix my car, but he's got no time. Back in Wheeling, I can use his, I guess, but it was really nice of Tim to drive me, because Tim looks out for me."

"He didn't make any plans to pick you up?" I said.

"He's gone to Iraq," she said.

"What?"

"They was flying some of them back today. He sat with me over at the hospital where doctors did my head test and waited for the van the Army sent. He had to be transported to Dulles airport, and now he's not even in the country."

"What did he do with his car?" I said.

She met my eyes and looked startled for a second. Then she clenched her hands, exhaled deeply, and shrugged. I remembered the woman in the lab saying: "Make a fist, honey," and the other lab technician adding: "Pretend you're mad at your boyfriend" as the band on my arm tightened. "Just a little pinch, you're fine," the woman drawing my blood had said reassuringly. It was the same person I'd almost fainted on days before. For her sake, I tried to be brave. I'd also tried to give her a genuine smile, but it had frozen on my face. She probably knew she'd see me again, and I felt certain I would see her. I couldn't remember her name, though she'd told me when I asked to be reminded. "Late for dinner," the joking technician had said, and that was all that had stuck in my mind. The woman in the waiting room was staring at me. She had circles under her eyes.

"Are you waiting to see the doctor?" I said.

"I guess somebody'll see me," she said. "After they did my test, they sent me over here to see the doctor. The lady over there —" she pointed to the receptionist's Dutch door, with the window pulled closed—"she was a help, giving me these."

Why wasn't the doctor coming out? I could give her a ride, but not to another state, not to Wheeling, West Virginia. Beyond the glass doors, a vacuum started loudly. Suddenly, the woman who'd drawn my blood walked quickly past us, tears streaming, mouth tight, clutching a pink piece of paper. Instead of looking at her, the woman with the ice packs said: "I guess I'm waiting for the doctor. I guess that's what I do, I wait for the doctor."

She began to rock. She wet her lips with her tongue, then ducked her head. I watched the water slosh back and forth in the bag. Her pleated skirt ended above her knees, and one knee was considerably larger than the other. An incision made a rivulet through the swelling.

The doctor came down the hallway, bouncing on his toes a little, and turned into the waiting area. He had on knee-length Lycra pants, white socks, and running shoes. He wore a sweatshirt advertising a drug I'd never heard of, with curlycues rising out of the word. He was carrying a zipped canvas bag.

"Still here?" he said, frowning in our direction. Since he didn't make eye contact, I couldn't tell whether he was asking me or her. Before I could answer, he ducked his head through the open door of the lab. "Carrie?" he said, walking in.

The woman said: "My doctor said the migraines had to stop, because the medicine couldn't. That's what he said. Had to be the migraines, because there was no other way. He's funny."

The doctor came back into the waiting room, frowning. "Carrie?" he called. He listened intently, much longer than it would have taken to receive an answer. Then he went back and turned off the light, pulled the door shut, and tested to make sure it was locked by pulling on it hard, several times. I waited mutely for him to do something about the woman with the ice packs. He walked past us,

frowning, saying quietly: "Take care."

The woman rocked, the bag slipping from behind her neck. I caught it, so she could get a better grip, which she did, her hand on top of the bulge of water. I saw that her knuckles were quite swollen. "Fifty-four years old and off with her high school sweetheart," she said. "When I was in that other place, they didn't do nothing to me. They might not have known my mother was gone, aged 54 and a romantic, or that my daddy couldn't travel, but they knew I had Tim on my side because he went there, he'd said, You do anything to her, you've got me to answer to. The other time he went to Iraq a sniper got his best friend Billy Lee Centers and nobody never knew where the bullet came from. Nobody's got the right suits over there, or the right equipment. But no sir, no sir: not many people want to mess with Tim."

"Things will be better," I said, suddenly very tired. I nodded in agreement with my platitude, letting the words protect me like armor, and walked to the elevator without really saying goodbye to the woman.

The doctor was already gone. He'd probably taken the stairs.

When the elevator arrived, I rode down alone. It was a relief to see people milling around in the entrance area where patients registered. There was a Mennonite family, the father in his flat-topped straw hat, his beard mottled with white, who stood holding his limp baby in the

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crook of his arm. He was communicating with his wife in one-handed sign language. He wanted to get in the elevator. She didn't.

The lobby's doors opened and I stepped into the vestibule, and then a second set of doors opened and I walked outside. In a parking place right in front of the building, the doctor stood, holding a piece of paper he must have taken from under his windshield wiper. The wiper was still flipped back. A parking ticket? No, it wasn't the size or shape of a parking ticket. It was a pink piece of paper he stood squinting at, the canvas bag dropped beside him on the asphalt.

I'd seen him Tuesday, he'd called me at home Wednesday night (after I'd come close to fainting in the lab) to see how I was doing, he'd come in especially to see me today. He'd certainly done enough. I walked on as if I hadn't seen him, but as I started the car, I could see in my peripheral vision that he had not moved. I avoided looking at him as I drove by.

The light was a fast one at the end of the drive, and only two cars in front of me made it onto the main road before it flashed yellow for about three seconds, then red. Cars streamed by. It came as such a relief when I suddenly remembered I had a car radio. I turned it on, expecting the evening news report, eager to be distracted, but instead a young voice, broadcasting from the university, announced that the next song would be by Girlyman, who would be playing at nine that night at Gravity Lounge. The song was called "On the Air," and the male singer was emphatic and energetic, and if I'd been a lot younger I would have been chicken-pecking the air to keep time with the beat. It was really a good song, but it was no longer a time of my life when I'd be at some lounge, listening to a band called Girlyman.

I turned right, merging onto the 250 Bypass. They were always constructing more roads, widening everything, repaving, reconceiving. You couldn't keep up with all their ideas for how the roads could handle more traffic, how roads configured like handcuffs could morph into magician's handkerchiefs, twisting into butterflies. Everything could work better, if only a few hold-out farmers who weren't even really farmers would let the city buy their land. A green Honda Element shook from the speed with which it merged off the exit ramp, but heavy traffic slowed it, and I rode its bumper, checking my gas gauge, thinking of the story my husband told about running low on gas, though he'd been saved by riding on the wake of the car in front of him on the autobahn. When he mentioned that road, he always ended his stories the same way: "They make you carry first-aid kits, but why? If you have an accident at those speeds, nothing's left but dust."

After the song, I moved the dial until I found the BBC news, but it was depressing—the soldier who had turned his dog on pyramids of prisoners at Abu Ghraib (no mystery about how those had been created) had been sentenced to jail—so I turned it off and tried to think of something nice. A drink would be nice. Though I wasn't much of a drinker and it wouldn't help my blood pressure, it might be the night for a drink. I thought about my husband, in Cleveland. I hadn't told him about the first lab report. Maybe I would consolidate them, when I talked

to him on the phone, making no exact mention of today's third blood draw. (I'd heard the term sitting in the hard chair with the little table that curved over my lap, remembered being in kindergarten, when I would have thought that "blood draw" sounded like something fun we'd been assigned to do with red fingerpaint.) I looked down and saw a streak of blood protruding from under the bandage. Cars were whizzing around me. Quickly, I bent my arm in statue-in-the-park fashion and brought it tightly to my chest. In front of me, cars of many colors paled, then became uniformly tinged with gold. I thought it was my vision, that I might be passing out, but then I realized it was just the light: there was an amazing sunset I hadn't noticed, and the way the gray clouds roiled over the orange sun sent down a light that was like nothing I'd ever seen. The little bit of blood wasn't anything, a trickle in a Frederic Church painting, nothing to worry about. The radio had turned to static, so I pushed the "select" button to find a station that was playing classical music. Some idiot passed on the right and almost sideswiped me, then sped off as if he'd achieved liftoff. My husband had tried to get me to fly to Cleveland with him. This very night he would be listening to the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra. What would he do with the other ticket?

I looked at the seat next to me, empty. I hoped that the seat next to my husband would remain empty; in my mind's eye, I tried to conjure up my worst imagining of the other woman, but unexpected even to me, she didn't take shape. My husband was sitting alone at the symphony. The doctor, however . . . he was sure to be sitting in his car, behind the wheel, still staring at that note. He most certainly would not have turned on the radio to either Girlyman or Abu Ghraib news, or even to Chopin. That's what the "select" button had found me: Chopin. There would be no soundtrack to any of the doctor's thoughts, and although I did not know them exactly—neither did I know them as his patient when I'd sat in the chair beside his desk for the third time that week—I pretty much knew it was Carrie who had written the note, and what the note said, and that he, himself, had not taken care. I had a crazy thought: What if the three of us were in the car, headed away from all of it, driving to Wheeling? What would the conversation be as the woman from the waiting room never stopped talking, and the doctor never began, and I, in my usual way, asked a few questions, almost for the sake of politeness, then stopped speaking because I didn't want to hear the answers?

I heard a thump and lowered the window, afraid I had a flat tire, but the sound did not continue. There was only the rush hour's gauzy, ambient noise that seemed to unroll forever, stretched under the remarkably glowing sky. If silence was golden, tonight's sunset was the personification of silence: no Chopin, no choked tears, no recriminations, nothing but silent harmony.

With the next thump, I realized the sound I'd been hearing had been my own heartbeat. I'd been holding my breath.

In front of me, a hawk waited until the last possible second to take off, so engrossed with eating whatever had died on the road that its instincts nearly failed about when to take flight. ❖

FICTION

Cowboys and Indians

By Louis Begley

Lord knows when I met Harry Livingston. Probably during my first winter in New York, right after college. In any case it was because of him that, a few years later, in 1962 or 1963, I enrolled in Niko's gym, an establishment then located on the second floor of a tenement on East 45th Street, where Harry was a star student. On the ground floor there was an Italian restaurant, which has disappeared from that address and perhaps altogether from the world of commerce. Nothing will make me forget though how the smells of olive oil, garlic, and fish emanating from it mixed in the gym with the heavier odor of overheated bodies. Niko was not a name only. He existed in the form of a middle-aged Latvian who spoke English fluently but with a heavy accent, neither clearly Slavic nor German. His facial features, bearing, and teaching habits led me to suspect that in the old country he had been a guard at a concentration camp. The method of gymnastics he taught consisted of work on the trapeze, parallel bars, and rings, and doing cartwheels, somersaults, handstands, and headstands. A session's culminating point was an exercise that required you to fold your body into a figure Niko called the square. From that position you moved into a series of other contortions progressively more painful and less easily described. Some years later I was reminded of them when at La Mamma in New York I watched the performance of a young Tokyo-based butoh company, but, at the time that Niko put me through those contortions, their aesthetic potential escaped me utterly. I was far too preoccupied by the effort they required, and most often I was on the verge of being sick to my stomach, a consequence for me of hanging upside down. A master class followed the basic sessions I attended. Livingston naturally took part, but no one expected me to remain. Instead, I showered under a feeble stream of water that changed without warning from lukewarm to

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scalding hot and back again, held a handkerchief to my nose to filter out the worst of the stench, and crept away to breakfast at the luncheonette across the street. A family of Greeks ran it. They served good coffee, the kind that was hard to find in New York before it became the capital of cappuccino and latte. I had to struggle to keep down my breakfast, and for a good hour after I had arrived at the office, I couldn't concentrate on my work. My office mate enjoyed telling me how green I looked about the gills and asking why I didn't quit Niko's. It was a good question, since this was the first gym I had set foot in since freshman year in college. My stock answer was that Niko would break my legs if I quit.

The real reason, which I wasn't about to tell my nosy colleague, was the furious crush I had on Livingston's wife, Rosie. I first went to Niko's on a dare, because Livingston had ragged me about being soft. Soon afterward, however, he introduced me to his wife, and the effect on me was such that I declared myself a convert and almost never missed a morning session at the gym when Livingston was scheduled to attend. My purpose was to make sure he didn't forget me and to give him every opportunity to ask me to a meal. From time to time he did, usually to Sunday lunch at their place in Connecticut, and then, during a few precious hours, I would experience the bliss of being with Rosie. I don't know how else I would have remained in Livingston's line of vision, there being nothing we had in common, except being friends with one married couple and having gone to the same college. Harry was not only older than I and married, he was also rich, he was a vice president at a big bank, and Rosie and he had children. Those were attributes of real grownups. By contrast, my relative poverty, unglamorous employment—I was a junior editor at a magazine that Livingston knew about but didn't read—and celibate condition all relegated me to an undeveloped, intermediate status. I was a human caterpillar: a fuzzy, defenseless organism with an undefined future. There was a book I wanted to write, and a contract for it that had been more or less promised by the publisher. I wasn't sure it would come through. Even if it did, I doubted that it would enhance my standing in Harry's eyes, certainly not any time soon.

Sunday lunches at the Livingstons', put together by Rosie, were delicious and quite simple. Sitting around the kitchen table, we ate pâté, cheese, salad, and fruit, and we drank Italian red wine. Afterward Rosie, the two boys—Simon who was eleven and Jay who was almost ten—and I walked in the woods that bordered on one side of the Livingstons' property and a remote section of a state park on the other. It was rare for Harry to join us. In spite of his prowess at the gym, he seemed to tire easily and needed a nap after the meal. Drinking a good bit more than Rosie and I may have contributed to the fatigue. If he wasn't going to lie down, he studied papers that had to do with his work at the bank, which was the financing of large commercial real-estate developments. From the appearance and heft of the documents he would haul out of his attaché case, and the way he spoke about the transactions, I could see that it was a complicated business.

They were made to be photographed for some ever-expanding family album, those Livingstons: each one of them tall, slender, and blond. Harry's hair was the color of his thick, gold wedding band; Rosie and her sons had flaxen hair. I think that she found, quite rightly, that the boys' looks were romantic. To accentuate that quality, she insisted that they wear their hair long—far longer than her own mop, which she combed with impatient and distracted movements of her fingers. Blue jeans had become the weekend uniform of people like

the Livingstons. Rosie and the boys wore theirs threadbare, matched with white Brooks Brothers shirts, which, in Rosie's case, I took to be Harry's hand-me-downs. On our walks in the woods, during which we often played hide-and-seek, I would ask myself, when I glimpsed for the briefest of moments a streak of white among the tree trunks and green underbrush, whether I was in love with a woodland nymph or a very young faun. In fact, at a distance in that gloom, it was not easy to tell Simon apart from his mother. We also played a game that was part of Rosie's family traditions: cowboys and Indians. The cowboys were to capture and scalp the Indians and then kill them. I expressed surprise that palefaces should engage in a practice that had given Indians such a bad name. The explanation Rosie offered, at which the boys giggled, was that this was how she and her cousins had always done it. Given our small number, there could be only one Indian. Invariably, it was Rosie, being by far the fleetest of foot. Simon and Jay were also faster than I. But my presence, according to Rosie, made the game fair, because I could give the boys tactical advice. She would take a five minutes' head start, and then the hunt was on, always within a specified large perimeter. We had one hour in which to encircle Rosie or back her into a corner, and then to wrestle her to the ground. If the time limit was exceeded, she won and teased us relentlessly.

One Sunday, she was particularly hard to find. When at last I thought I had spotted her, I shouted to Simon, who ran toward her at top speed in as straight a line as possible, while Jay and I took off to the right and left, as required by the rules of engagement. The underbrush was thick. Scratched and out of breath, I finally got near to where Rosie was and saw that she and Simon were having a real no-holds-barred fight, but I did not see until I had arrived within a few paces from them that he had torn her shirt so that it hung open in the front. She had nothing under it. I turned my head away quite quickly, but not before I had seen her heart-rending, little-girl's breasts, with nipples like carmine berries. However unintentional, the pause was long enough for her to realize that I had looked at her. She blushed terribly.

All the way home, Rosie scolded Simon about her shirt and playing too rough. Not a word about my role in the incident was said by either of us then or while I drank the tea she had offered while we waited for Harry to take me back to the station or at any time afterward when we happened to meet. But, by the time I took my seat on the train, I understood that she was no longer my friend, although until then we had gotten along so well, and I had even begun to think that some greater form of intimacy was not impossible. I concluded at first that it was my awkward and stupid indiscretion that had angered her so far beyond reason. Remaining angry, being unwilling or unable to forgive, seemed to go naturally with the intransigence I had observed in her in the past and found so very attractive and endearing. Later, I began to wonder whether perhaps she thought that some sort of Rubicon had been crossed in those woods, so that it was, on the contrary, my subsequent silence and inaction that gave her offense. But what was I to have said or done, given the situation—such, at least, as I understood it? And was her understanding different? I am not sure that it matters. She was not someone who expected you to act rationally in all circumstances.

Some months later I received the advance for the book I had been hoping to write. There was some money left in my pocket even after I had paid various debts. After a session at Niko's, I took leave of Harry Livingston and sailed for Europe. By and by thoughts of Rosie stopped tormenting me. When I returned to New York

more than three years later, I heard that Harry had left the bank. His mother had died and, being as a result richer than ever, he went into partnership with a college classmate to invest in office buildings in the Southwest. This information came from the Livingstons' country neighbors, the couple at whose city apartment I had first met them. They followed up by having me to dinner with him and Rosie. If she felt better disposed toward me, the change was imperceptible. In fact, she seemed to make a point of knowing nothing about my newly acquired modest renown. Then I left the country again. Long sojourns in Europe devoted to writing became a fixture of my existence, as did persistent backaches, which I was told were the consequence of a sedentary life, a predisposition to arthritis, and an unwillingness to exercise. Over the years, I passed through the hands of masseurs, acupuncturists, and orthopedists recommended by fellow sufferers on both continents. Their ministrations brought occasional relief, but those moments of grace were never long lasting. During an especially bad period, I returned to New York suffering from acute pain, probably aggravated by travel, that had spread from my back to my neck and left arm. I found myself next to Harry a few days later, leaning against the bar of our college club. Liquor was a painkiller that never failed me, and by and large I was better off when I was standing. He looked me over, shook his head, and commented that, for a man whose most recent book was supposed to be a success, I looked down at the mouth. I nodded and told him about my misery.

Come to Niko's, he exclaimed, whacking me on the shoulder, right where it hurt the most, they'll fix you up in no time.

You're mad, I replied. In my condition, I could no more get on one of Niko's trapezes than I could fly.

You don't understand, he countered. There is now a group that shares Niko's space. They specialize in exercises for dancers. Stretches, general conditioning, and that sort of thing. Quite a few injured ballerinas go there. They're something to watch. Meet me at the gym the day after tomorrow, at the usual time.

I protested against the early hour.

That's all right, he said, come at nine. I'll have already washed and dressed by then and will introduce you around. They'll be glad to be able to say that you're a client.

I did as he said. Madame Olga, the presiding genius of the dancers' gym, was an aged but still beautiful and limber Russian ballerina who had maintained intact a system of training invented by Vladimir, a Cossack ballet master from St. Petersburg, whose preferred student as well as perhaps common-law wife she had been after 1918, when he fled to Germany and later to France. Photographs of the great man dominated the walls of Olga's part of the premises. In the earlier ones he appeared, arms akimbo, in a belted tunic, bouffant black pantaloons tucked into midcalf, soft boots, and a fur hat, or in leotards, arranging enraptured dancers in partnering positions in *Swan Lake.* Later in life, he could be seen showing off his muscles, clad only in a curious garment that I examined over and over in the hope of determining whether it was a jockstrap or a pair of old Jockey shorts. Perhaps those American staples were considered to be the height of chic in the dance and gymnastics precincts of Monte Carlo circa 1930. A group of perhaps ten of us, mostly women, worked out on mats or contraptions that I thought at first shared many of the characteristics of St. Lawrence's grill, the bed of Procrustes, and Kafka's harrow. Depending on the gravity or the interest of our case, we were supervised individually by Madame Olga herself, or by one of her former colleagues

at the Ballets du Marquis de Cuevas, or by an apprentice. That last word described very young women who were either aspiring or already failed dancers reduced to teaching pupils like me in exchange for the use of the machines for their own excercise and Madame Olga's instruction. If successful, they were eventually certified by Olga as authorized teachers of the great man's precepts and technique, codified by her as the St. Petersburg Method. There was a comic side to the zeal with which Olga pursued her ministry and invoked the great man's name, but I did not allow myself to be irreverent. She cured me, and the cure stuck for a long time.

I don't remember whether, before leaving the country again, I invited Harry to lunch to thank him or only intended to do so. Given the disorganized nature of my existence in New York at that time—I was living in a borrowed apartment on lower Fifth Avenue but saw a good deal of a lady who lived uptown and made difficulties about spending the night at my place —the latter hypothesis is more likely. The lady and I broke up opportunely just before my departure. I settled in Rome, off the Piazza del Popolo, in a street known for artists' ateliers. Most probably, I sent Harry a card with my new address and telephone number because, some years later, he called to announce an impending visit. All four of them were coming, and they wanted to see me. Of course, I invited them for a drink at my place to be followed by dinner at the restaurant in the Piazza, which was famous for its boiled beef. It turned out to be an easy and festive occasion, much of it given over to Harry's discoursing about his firm's investments and the boys' successes at college. Rosie broke in from time to time to chirp rather impersonally about their new garden. At the end of the meal, I failed in my effort to prevent Harry from seizing the bill from the waiter.

I heard nothing more about them until the day when I came upon a short article in the *Herald Tribune* about Harry and his partner Greg Williams having been forced into personal bankruptcy. It was a sad story, typical of the time: they had borrowed and built too much in the Southwest. Suddenly, the oil and gas boom was over, and the rental market turned against them. I checked with the Livingstons' country neighbors, who were still our only link. They said that in fact it was possible that a bankruptcy would be avoided, but Harry stood to lose everything that wasn't locked up in the family trusts. Rosie's own money, to the extent she hadn't put it into the business, was, of course, safe. The big question was how much she had invested in the business and what would happen to the house in Connecticut. The apartment in New York would surely have to be sold. A wave of genuine sadness overcame me. I called in succession Harry's office, where I constantly got a busy signal, and then the private numbers in the city and in the country. A recorded announcement told me that the phones had been disconnected at the request of the subscriber. The new numbers were unlisted. Thereupon, I sat down and wrote what in my mind I called a letter of condolence, addressing it, after considerable hesitation to Rosie. The next day I wrote a shorter note to Harry. I didn't receive an answer from either, a failing for which I chose to blame the Italian mail service.

When in the spring of 2002 I returned to New York with the intention of making it once again my home, I had reached the age at which, for my beloved Balzac, a man was undeniably *un vieillard*. More or less vigorous, but *un vieillard quand même*. The view taken in the new millennium differed: it seemed that old age and decrepitude had been indefinitely postponed, perhaps even abolished, so that one stepped from a state of outwardly perfect

preservation directly into death. Were not some of my contemporaries running in marathons? Others were busy siring children. In smaller numbers they were surely doing both. Whether the new fathers expected to be around for the children's graduation from high school, let alone college, was an interesting question. For all I knew, it was a subject treated in prenuptial agreements—if the aspiring ancient father had the means to justify the expense of preparing such a document. I did not think that, left to myself, I was likely to find the fountain of youth. So, when my nemesis, pain in the lower back, returned to torment me, I remembered Niko's gym, my miraculous cure, and the claim Olga had so often made for the St. Petersburg Method that an hour session, taken three times a week, will give you a new body. My ambition was more modest: I wanted to be free of pain. Although my love affair with the city continued, and I was proud of the pluck shown by New Yorkers in the face of the dismasting of Manhattan, so far as my personal life was concerned, I might as well have been living in a desert. I felt lonely. Many of my friends had moved away in search of a gentler climate and lower cost of living. Some were practicing arts and crafts in places like Santa Fe. Too many had died. Because of my long absences from the city, I had lost touch with others.

It took me a while to get around to it, but finally I made the decision: I would return to the old gym. Right away, I ran into an obstacle. The telephone number I had in my address book was no longer in service. In the telephone directory there was no trace of Niko's gym or Olga's or of any of the variants on those names that I could think of. Piqued, not ready to give in, I even thought briefly of finding Harry Livingston and asking him for a lead, but the idea seemed grotesque. Besides, I didn't know where to look for him either. Instead, I scoured listings for gyms and similar establishments in the Yellow Pages, and finally came upon the Riga Health and Fitness Club on West 56th Street. Didn't all Latvians know each other? I reasoned that whoever ran that outfit would direct me to Niko—unless Niko too was dead or had gone out of business or was a competitor so formidable that access to him should not be facilitated.

The voice of the man who answered the telephone could have been Niko's, if with age Niko's accent had become even thicker, which sometimes does happen. It turned out, however, that I was speaking to Karl, a nephew to whom Niko had sold the business upon retiring. The gym was carrying on as it always had. I shuddered at the memory of those trapezes and inquired about Niko's health. Very good, Karl informed me. He still teaches. At a big club in Vero Beach. I shifted the conversation to Madame Olga. Olga! Karl laughed. She'd be a hundred if she were alive. But don't worry, the school continues right at my place. We teach the Russky method. Come and check it out.

I took him up on the offer. As I looked around the anteroom of the new premises, having already written a large check to pay for a series of lessons, I realized that I too was being appraised by a group of young women, in various stages of athletic undress, lounging on two sofas , chewing apples, and drinking colored liquids from plastic bottles. Could these be, I asked myself hopefully, Demoiselles d'Avignon, class of 2002? They turned out to be a new generation of apprentice teachers of the St. Petersburg Method. And the burly men leaning against the wall, warily flexing their biceps, were not bouncers or enforcers; they were Karl's trainers, masters of the trapeze, the parallel bars, the headstand, and the square.

My hope that one of the nubile apprentices would undertake the renewal of my body was not fulfilled. As a client who had known Olga

herself, and worked under her direction, I had value as a link in the apostolic succession going all the way back to the old man, and I was placed in the care of Lola, a grim-looking lady. I had never seen her before, but I was assured that she had been Olga's comrade-in-arms and had been lucky enough to know Vladimir himself. As I pondered this development during my first session, which pushed me to the limits of endurance, I found a measure of consolation in the vision on my immediate left. Also exercising on a machine was a tall, brown-haired young woman in a red leotard, going through the drill without a supervisor. Sneaking glances at her as often as I could, I took in her strong body and face, which struck me as bold. The grace of her gestures and the flexibility of her limbs led me to think she might well be a dancer. I looked at her feet for confirmation but, long and narrow—and deliciously dirty—they ended in little toes that had never known the indignity of hours spent on pointe. Another detail completed my enchantment: the red of her toenail varnish swore with the red of her leotard. How lucky, I said to myself, how lucky that, alone among the clients, teachers, and apprentices, she is barefoot. Flaunting her disregard of rules!

Until I was quite sure that I had established the pattern of her attendance—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, always at the same hour—I went to the gym every day so as not to miss her. Afterward, I began to plan my week around being always on the machine next to hers, at her hour, on every one of her days. There were occasional disappointments, when inexplicably she wore ballet slippers or socks. They paled in comparison with unexpected gratifications: the times when she had no varnish on her toenails or the varnish was chipped or I saw the skin of her thigh through a seam of her leotard that had come undone. Once, when she was working with a teacher, I actually heard her speak. A deep voice with a flat, matter-of-fact accent that revealed nothing. One day, I lingered after she had finished her session so that I could ask Lola with which company my neighbor danced. It had occurred to me that she might be doing modern dance, which would account for the perfection of her toes. Perhaps I could see her perform. What company Kay dances with? Lola answered with a puzzled air. Yes, I insisted, isn't she a dancer? What a funny idea, Lola replied. She works in public relations. I'll tell her you thought she was a dancer. She'll be really flattered.

I didn't ask Lola to forbear, and I suppose she must have carried out her plan because, at the next session Kay, for the first time, smiled at me. I grinned back and looked at her feet. She had painted her toes silver. Was it a sign? That is how I took it and determined to intercept not that day but very soon. I would invite her for a drink. If she turned me down, which I feared was likely, I would switch to days on which she didn't come to the gym, thereby also escaping from Lola. Perhaps one of the young apprentices with a bare midriff would consent to take over my rejuvenation. On no account, however, would I give up the gym. I made another resolution too: I would after all look up Harry Livingston. It would be interesting to see what new games time had played with Rosie and him and those two boys who would now be older than I was when I first met them.

I never got around to asking Kay out. But that very afternoon I called the Livingstons' apartment—they were once again listed in the telephone directory—and, hearing that Harry was in Canada, where he looked after a family business that had survived the collapse of his racier activities, I arranged to have dinner with Rosie. ❖

Arts

American Studies

The Ballad in the Street

Listening for the muffled strains of a national culture

By Alan Trachtenberg

Certain forms of culture or collective consciousness put questions to those who live within them, questions whose answers are normally taken for granted at a level of behavior so deep that we are hardly aware of the enigmas buried in them. To call this or that familiar picture or habitual action or ritual saying *enigmatic* is to acknowledge and recover something uncertain, unfamiliar, and strange, something hidden and reified—turned as if to stone—within the practical normality of everyday existence. Approaching the commonplace and the familiar as if it were strange and enigmatic is to melt its protective stonelike armature, to reveal the provisional and arbitrary character of all human constructions. As a heuristic, the concept of enigma makes us aware of the role of interrogation that we typically ignore by taking it for granted. "Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put," Emerson wrote. "Let us interrogate the great apparition [by this he means *nature,* all that is the *NOT ME,* including art], that shines so peacefully around us." The aim of interrogation is to dispel the apparition of tranquillity and to reveal how unsettled, how agitated with unanswered questions, is our common life.

Enigma, hieroglyph, apparition: these are some of the tropes or metaphors by which we name not so much things themselves but our awareness of the opacity of things and their meanings. We can add *vagary* to this list, a term that historian Constance Rourke used to capture a sense of capriciousness, eccentricity, and extravagance that cannot readily be pinned down. *Vagary* calls up *frolic* and *prank,* any "departure or straying from the ordered, regular, or usual course of conduct, decorum, or propriety" *(OED).* Humor, Rourke wrote, "is a lawless element, full of surprises." The "American vagaries" that Rourke studied with her contagious enjoyment and gratitude are vernacular expressions of the shared everyday life of local and regional groups in the United States, expressions that qualify as native folk culture. High culture is symmetrical, revered as pristine. The divagating character of the vagarious, like the self-questioning character of the enigmatic, gives off for Rourke an authentic aroma of earth and sweat, the true character of the national experience, the people's experience, of the United States.

Vagary and *enigma* also convey something inherent about the act of criticism, its need to break through appearances to reach fundamental meanings, even as it recognizes that

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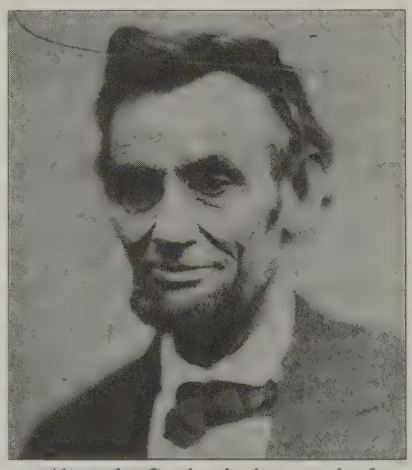
what looks fundamental may in all likelihood be revealed as delusion, conceit, another riddle wrapped in an enigma. Modern criticism subjects all that exists to the corrosive power of reason in the hope of solving the riddle, defeating the enigma, capturing and holding the vagaries under the glass of analysis and deconstruction. Is that a smile half playing on the sad lips of Abraham Lincoln in the last photograph that Alexander Gardner took of him in Washington shortly before or just after his Second Inaugural Address in March 1865? The speech concludes with the famous lines of offered conciliation, which Lincoln may well have realized would hardly suffice to dispel the bitterness of defeat or the arrogance of victory: "With malice toward none; with charity for all." If it is a smile, what does it signify? The question beguiles us. Does the smile imply that Lincoln's war-weary face hides a secret, an undisclosed meaning? Whatever else it may mean, the smile (if that's what it is) is an artifact of the camera. How does our knowledge of the procedures and the semiotic logic of photography mediate our interpretation of this face that photography has made so familiar? Only by responding to it as an enigma might we recover its life as a trace of an instant in the life of Lincoln, and its secondary life as cultural meaning.



Alexander Gardner's photograph of Abraham Lincoln.

Such a response would be in the spirit of historical criticism practiced by Constance Rourke and her generation—Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, Lewis Mumford, William Carlos Williams, Paul Rosenfeld. These early 20th-century "critics of culture" and left-wing intellectuals were influenced by the Progressive and Socialist movements and inspired, as the historian Casey Blake has shown, by promise of a "beloved community" in place of the competitive strife of daily existence. Their works in the 1910s and 1920s laid a foundation for the academic field of American studies that appeared in the 1930s and took hold in the 1950s. The indebtedness of the "movement" known as American studies to these early pioneers in cultural studies deserves remembering and honoring as a legacy, especially as it fades from view.

Rourke's *American Humor* (1931) has been one of the most durable of responses to Van Wyck Brooks's call in 1918 for a "usable past," a new heritage in opposition to the complacent aestheticism of "the genteel tradition." But Rourke dissociated herself from two of Brooks's precepts: that America has "had no cumulative culture" and that "the spiritual welfare of this country depends altogether upon the fate of its creative minds." Brooks thought the American cultural tradition was impoverished, in need of regeneration from above by liberated artists and intellectuals. Evoking vagaries that were full of surprises, Rourke took Brooks's high-flown motives down a peg or two. In place of impoverishment, she showed the indebtedness of major writers from Emerson to Henry James and contemporaries like Frost and Eliot to the bursting, lawless energies of the vernacular comedy of everyday life in America. Even as she accepted the cultural mission of inventing a "usable past," Rourke revised Brooks's view that America's national culture was undernourished, puritanical, chauvinistic, given to celebration of violent individualism, and crippled by antagonistic separation between highbrow and lowbrow. With the broad scholarship in folk life at her command, Rourke demonstrated that "high" art in the United States has always been nurtured by roots in folk cultures.

A woman of the cultural left, modernist rather than antiquarian in her tastes, a friendly critic of 1930s Marxism, an anti-Fascist activist in the years before her early death in 1941, Rourke pledged herself to the goals of democratic cultural criticism. Americans, she wrote, "do not have that strong and natural association

with evidences of the past which is still commonplace in other countries." By evidence she meant not only verbal culture but also things, sounds, tales, songs, furniture, paintings and photographs, theater and dance. When she died at the age of 56, she was at work on a projected three-volume history of American culture—"evidence of enough native culture to convert a generation of disenchanted artists," as the historian Joan Shelley Rubin has written. In a review of the posthumous collection of Rourke's work, *The Roots of American Culture*, edited by Van Wyck Brooks, Alfred Kazin wrote: "She sought what so many modern Americans have lost, what so many Europeans have established as the first principle of a human existence—the sense of locality, the simple happiness of belonging to a particular culture."

What Rourke and her colleagues sought was a nation, an America rooted in particular places, languages, ethnicities, ways of life: America not as a single dominating culture but as a medley of cultures, a harmonious multiplicity of cultures. The word *culture* itself has a multiplicity of meanings. Raymond Williams, a cultural historian, points out in his book *Culture and Society* (1958) that the word as we understand it today arose in England in response to industrialization; *culture* came to stand for communal traditions and patterns of behavior and feeling, relations between natural and man-made places that undergo rapid change with the rise of industrial capitalism. It came to mean a whole way of life, something that might offer a model for newly formed communal relations imagined by socialist critics of the ferociously selfish and destructive capitalist order. It is what Van Wyck Brooks called "a living culture," which he imagined still survived "everywhere in Europe, in spite of the industrialization of society."

For Brooks this beguiling image of an organic culture projected an impression of a "nation"—"a living, homogeneous entity, with its own faith and consciousness of self." The vision of a culture both organic and national lay at the base of the idea of an emergent democratic America that Brooks shared with Rourke and others of their generation. But the vision foundered in contradiction. America's entry into World War I represented, as Randolph Bourne saw more clearly than others, a fateful step toward imperialism, away from the democratic ethos the critics had assumed as foundational to "our America." Mass immigration and cultural multiplicity had created millions of acculturated city dwellers who had only the poisonous distractions of patriotic fervor and debased commercial culture to prop up their lost sense of identity and of belonging somewhere.

In its origins, the academic field of American studies took from Emerson, Whitman, Brooks, and their followers the idea of America as a yet unrealized ideal, an idea necessary as motive and goal to the practice of historical cultural criticism. "The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and gait of the body," Emerson wrote in 1837; "show me the ultimate reason of these matters . . . and the world no longer lies a dull miscellany and lumber-room, but has form and order." Through an art of the common, the familiar, the low, and indeed the enigmatic, Emerson believed that "a nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men." This was echoed by Van Wyck Brooks 80 years later:

> As soon as the foundations of our life have been reconstructed and made solid on the basis of our own experience, all these extraneous, ill-regulated forces will rally about their newly found center; they will fit in, each where it belongs, contributing to the essential architecture of our life. Then, and only then, shall we cease to be a blind, selfish, disorderly people; we shall become a luminous people, dwelling in the light and sharing our light.

Whitman understood the stakes in this exceptionalist view of the nation to be fateful. In "Democratic Vistas" (1871) he wrote that America and democracy are "convertible terms," or had better be. Otherwise, America is a failed idea, "the most tremendous failure of time," "merely a passing gleam." Following Whitman, Rourke wanted to contribute to the

conversion of America into a democracy by recovering vagaries of native cultures scorned by the genteel guardians of high culture. The enemy were those who denied that the United States could achieve a discrete cultural nationality on the basis of its native arts and habits. After World War II, in the years of the Cold War, American studies more or less adopted the same position, with the query "What is American?" as a core, defining issue.

Recently the field has experienced an almost 180-degree reversal on this score. The day has long passed when any hint of national celebration has appeared in discourse associated with American studies. To the contrary, the concept of nation has been virtually exorcised as incongruous in an age of globalism. To confine a field of studies to the boundaries of a nation-state has come to seem deliberate blindness. Leading questions now are likely to be about the global menace of the American military and economic hegemony, the rhetorical conflation of America and democracy as a disguise for imperial intentions and practices. The quest for cultural nationality has been almost entirely surpassed by a quest for transnational and postnational identities and prospects. That American studies faces an uncertain future is a sign of the faded status of the early 20th-century "critics of culture," since Americanist critics give so little credibility to Whitman's aporia about the convertibility of America and democracy, its having been debased by being used so cynically in U.S. foreign policy.

The notion of interchangeability of the terms *democracy* and *America* mystifies both terms, removes them from actual histories of struggle and conflict, and makes racism, sexism, and economic exploitation seem aberrations rather than structural features of a harshly divided society. To view the United States in a secular way, as a society torn by conflicting interests, pulled apart by struggles over power and wealth, divided by color and gender and social class as much as by region and ethnic distinctiveness, its history shaped more by commodity production and the degradation of labor than by sacral ideals, continually restructured by the privileged to maintain and reproduce privilege—to view it in such a way cannot but jolt the tradition in which the name America was once considered a precondition for cultural democracy.

And the idea of the United States as a singular, coherent nationality, based, as Lincoln believed, on universal principles as articulated in the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence, now faces an impasse. It is worth recalling the alternative that Randolph Bourne posed in his famous essay of 1916, "Trans-National America." Bourne urged that we think again "of what Americanism may rightly mean." "No intense nationalism of the European plan can be ours," he wrote, and proposed "a new and more adventurous ideal: Do we not see how the national colonies in America, deriving power from the deep cultural heart of Europe and yet living here in mutual toleration, freed from the age-long tangles of races, creeds, and dynasties, may work out a federated ideal?" Colonies of difference, vagarious and enigmatic to each other, "live here inextricably mingled, yet not homogeneous. They merge but they do not fuse." Their lesson is that "we shall have to give up the search for our native 'American' culture."

Bourne proposed to embrace these multiple cultural languages, the heteroglossia of the practical democracy of American streets. His late essays on "war and the intellectuals" implicitly asked whether it was enough for cultural criticism to study culture alone. "The cultural question," wrote John Dewey, "is a political and economic one before it is a definitely cultural one." Historical cultural criticism can desanctify the terms *culture, democracy,* and *America,* freeing them from their reified state, flushing out the enigmas and vagaries hidden within their apparently normal and familiar meanings, submitting them to rigorous social and political scrutiny. As the Latin origin of *scrutiny* reveals, the word refers to rubbish or trash, *scruta,* and the search by rummaging (like ragpicking) for something worth keeping. It's a matter of opening our eyes to what lies hidden plainly in sight, under clouds of neglect, indifference, or deliberate obfuscation. Scrutiny implies an act of vision to light a way ahead. "In a dark time," wrote Theodore Roethke, "the eye begins to see." ❖

The Edgy Optimist

At 76, saxist Sonny Rollins is still on top of his game

By Gene Santoro

"I've got to remember I'm on the wrong side of 40," 76-year-old Sonny Rollins says ruefully. He's in bed on his 120-acre farm in upstate New York. Two years after his wife Lucille's death and five years after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center trapped him in his Battery Park City apartment, one of jazz's last legends can't shake the flu he's had for months. He's canceled concerts, which he doesn't like and Lucille would have hated. He's taking a second round of antibiotics, which he doesn't like either. So he's feeling kind of blue.

Theodore Walter Rollins has been called jazz's greatest living improviser so many times it's become his Homeric epithet. In 1959, musicologist Gunther Schuller wrote an essay using "Blue 7" from Rollins's *Saxophone Colossus* album to explicate the saxophonist's thematic way of worrying at melodies to unfold variations, a subtle attack that recalls his idols Lester Young and Billie Holiday. "It's like holding the melody up to the light and rotating it, like a jeweler, to create new melodies," Rollins explains. "There's no limit to what you can do that way." That is, if you're Sonny Rollins. Ask any significant contemporary saxist—from Joshua Redman to Joe Lovano to Branford Marsalis—about influences; Rollins's name is at or near the top of the list.

In concert—the only way to experience Rollins at his best—he stalks the stage wielding his tenor like it's a toy, twisting and turning down the corridors of his restless imagination with such fluency that he seems less a purely musical, and more a natural, phenomenon. His fluid tone shifts as he ransacks his memory for fragments of tunes to weave through his solos. His love of pop culture, from cowboy movies to dancing, led him to annex calypso to jazz in "St. Thomas" and to rework Tin Pan Alley schmaltz like "Toot Toot Tootsie." Few jazz artists aside from Miles Davis, Rollins's most frequent bandmate in the early 1950s, could touch that sort of material without going soft. The integration of Rollins's personality and his musical voice is what makes him so formidable as a player and as a person. He is a jazz existentialist.

"All this business is making me sick," he drawls. For decades Lucille dealt with the nitty-gritty of record labels and lawyers, booking agents and tour logistics. Before her death, Rollins's longtime label was absorbed in one of the endless music-industry consolidations, so she and Sonny decided to start their own label, Doxy. But with her gone, Rollins had to handle negotiations for distribution in Europe, Japan, the United States, and Canada. They were tortuous, and torturous for him. "It's one reason I'm still feeling flu-ish," he says. "I don't always know who I can trust, Gene."

So his new album *Sonny, Please* makes him a recording label head, I say. We laugh at the irony. This is the man who once told me, "*Career* is a funny word. I don't have a career. People know me because I've been around a

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long time, okay? And fortunately, I'm a survivor. But I'm not rich, and I'm not trying to get rich. Trying to get rich playing music is an oxymoron; there's something wrong with that. The society's different now, though, so maybe that will change too."

With a Sonny Rollins Web site offering a Signature Collection ("the kind of stuff people sell at my concerts," he says, embarrassed) and his new CD, Rollins has entered the world of business only as far as he needs to: "This feels like a natural progression. I've always maintained control over my music and produced my records anyway. This way I own them." He laughs. "I promise to do honest business and maintain integrity. Of course, I'm the only artist on Doxy."

Rollins's mother was born in the Virgin Islands. He grew up in Harlem with other jazz wannabes like Jackie McLean. His older brother and sister studied and became classical musicians, but Sonny was drawn to Swing Era jazz and pop. As an adolescent he met his bebop idols: Charlie Parker, Max Roach, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell. Like McLean he rehearsed with Monk: "He used to sneak me into bars after school."

The film documentary *Straight No Chaser* (1989) captures Monk, the highly eccentric anchorman at the 1940s uptown sessions where Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Christian, and Kenny Clarke hammered out the complex language for what the press would dub bebop. Monk's piano was as laced with idiosyncrasies as his personality was. He was radical (in his jagged melodies, rhythms, and percussive attack) and conservative (in his roots: gospel, pop, blues, and stride).

In 1953, 23-year-old Rollins joined Monk, Roach, and bassist Oscar Pettiford to record *Brilliant Corners*, an album of Monk's original, gnarled tunes. The title track previews things to come: Rollins elbows the phrasing of his solo into odd shapes and looming, leaping intervals, while Roach's playing limns percussive melody.

"Monk had a very different style, something like Duke Ellington but more extreme," Rollins says. "His rhythmic and harmonic conceptions were unique. He was a catalyst, a definite hero. He energized Coltrane and myself to do our own thing. Part of it was that he was so dedicated to the music. It's all he cared about."

In late 1955, Rollins joined the Clifford Brown-Max Roach Quintet. This launched a period of intense creativity. The taut, high-energy outfit spiked difficult arrangements with flaring horns and hairpin-curve tempo shifts. Roach's kinetic drums underlined and partnered Brown's slashing trumpet. Tracks like "Parisian Thoroughfare" suggest a marriage of musique concrète and jazz like those being framed by bassist and composer Charles Mingus, a good friend of both Roach and Rollins. On *Brownie Lives!* a live recording made shortly before Brown's death in an auto accident, Roach reroutes the band by recalibrating rhythms or suggesting—on the drums—changes in melodic direction. Rollins isn't as polished as Brown, but he bubbles with ideas: his opening on "Gertrude's Bounce" is startling, fiery, a clarion call.

And all the more inspiring because he had just recovered from heroin addiction. "You know the story, Gene: I wanted to show Charlie Parker that I was straight, so I went away to Chicago and got straight, and then he died before I could show him." Parker, the guiding genius of bebop, died at 34. Rollins worked at menial jobs while he cleaned up, tested himself by hanging around nightclubs where he was offered heroin, and when he passed the test decided he was fit to come back.

"When I joined the band in Chicago," he recalls, "I found that Brownie was the type of personality who exemplified everything that I felt jazz musicians should be. He wasn't destroying himself. He was playing great, he looked great, he was a plain-living guy, very humble, beautiful individual. That was a revelation to me. I was on the right track, but that band helped me stay there. Brownie was an anomaly: to be hip then, you had to shoot up. He was an angel."

The sociology of postwar heroin can still be a third-rail topic in jazz circles. Rollins explains, "Black people fought and died in the war, and were tired of waiting to get on the

Rollins, seen here in Manhattan in 1993, says, "Jazz at its best is the perfect picture of democracy."

front of the bus. Same old crap. Bebop, the new music, was linked up with that. This was one reason a lot of people liked Charlie Parker. He had a certain dignity: he'd always be very erect, talk in a very erudite manner. So as young people coming up, we saw this as the next wave and looked up to him. We weren't going to be buffoons or clowns anymore. This is great music and you must accept it, and we are people and you must accept us as people. It all ran together. That was one of the great things about Charlie Parker people haven't talked too much about.

"So a lot of it [heroin use] was imitation of Bird, guys wanting to imitate whatever he did to be able to play more like him—and that included shooting up. That was the bane of Bird's existence. He tried to stop us but he couldn't stop himself; that was his downfall. But see, it wasn't so much the drugs themselves as much as the fact that black musicians couldn't use drugs and get away with it. Billie Holiday was a drug addict, but so was Judy Garland, except she was white and could get away with it. Black musicians felt that this was yet another set of double standards. Remember, this was the first generation that wouldn't go quietly to the separate hotel, the back of the bus, the separate food counter; they got into fights about it." He mentions Miles Davis beaten by a cop outside Birdland, Sarah Vaughan beaten at Café Society. "That's what I mean by the social aspect of the drug abuse. It was a self-destructive form of rebellion that gave us a sense of community against a hostile world."

At this time, Rollins and Coltrane, who struggled with his own drug problem, met in the studio for *Tenor Madness*, where the contrasts are revealing. Rollins digs deep into bluesy roots while Coltrane creates sheets of arcing sound. But at the close there's a coming together.

In 1956, Rollins made his debut as a leader with *Saxophone Colossus*. He synthesizes what he'd learned from Monk in "You Don't Know What Love Is," scrambling time, warping tonality, moving through unusual intervals. And there's "St. Thomas," with its undulating rhythms and complex personal penumbra: Rollins's friend Harry Belafonte, who popularized Caribbean folk music in America, marched in Selma with Max Roach, Pete Seeger, and Martin Luther King Jr. In 1958, Rollins cut "Freedom Suite," nearly 20 minutes with a pianoless trio—the format Ornette

Coleman had just begun to explore. And Rollins's reliance on melody rather than "running changes" as the wellspring for his improvisations grew stronger with *Night at the Village Vanguard,* the remarkable *Way Out West,* and *Stockholm 1959.* He had reached his first peak.

"I was playing ideas," he says. Think of each track as a mini-essay. "There's No Business Like Show Business" and "Toot Toot Tootsie" were radio hits during Rollins's youth. *Way Out West* nods to the cowboy movies he loved. "I like to play pop songs and intersperse them into things that I'm doing. Fitting the melodies onto other changes takes discipline. You can't take 'Sunbonnet Sue' and put it into anything anywhere. The chords have to match, and the feeling has to match. Ella Fitzgerald had it down. It's one of the tools of jazz improvisation. The beautiful thing about jazz is that it can absorb everything else and still be jazz."

At this pinnacle, jazz's leading lone wolf took his first of two so-called retirements. In 1959 the goal was to reformulate his music; his nightly practicing on the Williamsburg Bridge prompted a now-famed short story called "The Bridge" in the July 1961 issue of *Metronome* magazine. (Author Ralph Berton shifted the location to the Brooklyn Bridge, sowing confusion ever since.) In the late 1960s, Rollins traveled to Asia to study Eastern philosophies. It's impossible to imagine any jazz musician of any stature today treating a "career" in this fashion.

"When I went away in '59," he explains, "I felt I wasn't playing as much as I should be playing. I had a lot of people—the press, fans—who built me up to the point where I couldn't deal with that without really feeling that I could deliver. So I had a strong motivation. I wanted to break some bad habits, like smoking. I'm a person that appreciates solitude anyway." He pauses. "Gene, the music we're involved in is very serious. And the people I've been fortunate enough to be around . . . well, it's something you don't want to defile."

The Bridge ended his exile. He added guitarist Jim Hall to his trio for this LP containing a mix of standards, like Billie Holiday's "God Bless the Child" and "Without a Song," and originals with saw-toothed melodies. It was an instant classic. The empathetic interaction between the guitarist, whose chords shimmer with the impressionistic beauty pianists like Ellington and Bill Evans brought to jazz, and the saxist, whose lyricism winds through the densest harmonic thickets without losing ebullience, produces some of jazz's most luminous moments.

There have been high points in Rollins's work since, especially on stage, and there have been lackluster recordings. *On the Outside* documents his interest in the 1960s avant-garde with mixed if provocative results. Also uneven is *All the Things You Are,* where Rollins faces off with Coleman Hawkins using free-jazz overblowing and chordless soloing, while Hawkins remains magisterially aloof. In 1966, he scored *Alfie,* orchestrated by Oliver Nelson for a 10-piece band. In the 1970s and 1980s, his albums suffered: trying on funky fusion, he lost his mercurial edge within formulaic jazz-rock backing. (One exception is Stevie Wonder's "Isn't She Lovely," an extended romp equal to anything Rollins ever cut.) He soloed on "Waiting on a Friend" for the Rolling Stones's *Tattoo You* because Mick Jagger heard him at the Bottom Line and called him up. Rollins first heard the finished track at a market near his farm: "I thought, Gee, there's something strange about that guy playing saxophone, and finally I realized, Wait, that's me! I wasn't credited on the record and didn't want to be; I was doing it as a lark, a challenge to see if I could relate to it."

Live, Rollins remains a creative cauldron, a saxophone Bach able to overcome mediocre concepts and flagging bands with his fugues. But even he has off nights. In 1985, in his concert at New York's Museum of Modern Art, which was recorded as *The Solo Album,* the music sounded as if he had relied too much on intuition and had stumbled uncharacteristically into solipsism: quotes, scales, and finger exercises untouched by his usual alchemy.

In the 1990s he performed with younger musicians like Branford Marsalis and Terence Blanchard. The press called them duels. He

laughs and shakes his head: "Duels?! Aieee! Do they ever refer to Pavarotti and Placido Domingo singing together as a duel? I wonder. No. They give those people more respect. 'Duel' is derogative. The whole attitude is demeaning to jazz, because jazz shouldn't be looked at like a boxing match. Jazz is a conversation between people who maybe haven't had a chance to discuss certain ideas before. We push each other in different directions, but the music is what benefits. And it should be entertaining at the same time, because people are seeing something real happening.

"Music is just a language. But it has a spiritual aspect, spiritual, mystical, whatever you want to call it, that needs to be communicated to people. Jazz at its best is the perfect picture of democracy. We're all playing on this different level; we're not down here on this material plane. So of course you transcend race and all that stuff.

"It really is American music; it fits so much of what the country is about. And this is the place it's most ignored, treated like a second-class citizen, like blacks. The official culture can't recognize it for what it is. Now everybody talks about jazz being America's classical music, but it's mostly an empty phrase. Even the way the big jazz festivals are put on shows that. [They are] sponsored by big corporations who want to use the music as an ad, which diminishes the music. It's a tricky subject."

On September 11, 2001, Rollins was staying at his pied-à-terre across from the World Trade Center and was trapped for a day and a night. "When I was evacuated," he says, "I had to walk down 40 flights of steep stairs. The stairwells are really narrow, right? And I had my horn, which made it difficult to turn the corners with all the people too. Then when I finally got to the bottom it was like a scene from a World War II movie. Sirens. Lights. My legs were like rubber. So I waited a minute. There were people looking at me askance, you know, big black man with a big expensive looking case. But this one cop says, 'Oh, you're Sonny Rollins,' and he helped me, pointed me to the right place, where the buses were evacuating people. I got there, 'Full up,' the guy said. Now Gene, I haven't told anybody this before, but being black, you just automatically think, well . . . "

I say, "There's no room on this bus, boy."

He laughs. "Well, exactly. I think I've heard this before. Anyway, there were these three old Italian ladies, dressed all in black, sitting on a wall there waiting so calmly in the midst of all this hysteria. Lucille used to love people from that generation; they dressed so properly and behaved so gracefully. I watched them and they calmed me down. That saved me from myself."

After Rollins was taken to Washington Irving High School, north of the "frozen" zone, Lucille sent their longtime driver to fetch him to the farm. "I was out of it, Gene; I couldn't focus on anything." But she convinced him to perform in Boston, as planned, on September 15. "I don't know whether she also had a deeper understanding of what that moment could mean. But for a person like her, once she said she'd do something she did it. That was it. Midwestern values. She was their quintessential representative."

"There was something different in the air that night [of the Boston concert]. The audience was hungry for something. The musicians acted a little different and played a little differently. Some other element was in there. I don't know how to describe it and I don't know what it was. But it was palpable. Not necessarily better or worse, just different." The recorded results, *Without a Song: The 9/11 Concert,* one of his best in years, wasn't issued until 2005.

Now, fighting the flu, he spends more time watching his favorite programs, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report.* He says things like, "Our current administration is constantly playing the fear card." Or "Bill O'Reilly is an evil venal man, because he knows he's lying to people. Colbert really nails him." He abhors virtual reality as the inhuman harbinger of a new Dark Ages. His current favorite book, in fact, is Morris Berman's *Dark Ages America.*

And yet, and yet. "When I'm off the bandstand, I become very pessimistic," he says, then smiles. "But once I'm playing, the music kicks in, and I play optimistically." And that is as good as it gets. ❖

When Maestros Were Maestros

Innovator, mentor, tyrant, Leopold Stokowski brought real joy to music making

By Janet Frank

The National Symphony Orchestra, where I've played cello for many years, is searching for a new music director—as are the orchestras in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Nashville, Dallas, and Detroit. This has led me to think about what makes a good leader and to reconsider my first conductor—Leopold Stokowski.

It happens that I recently saw a black-and-white video made 42 years ago of Stokowski conducting the American Symphony Orchestra. The video, presented at the Library of Congress, shows Stokowski at 83 leading and talking about one of the first performances of Charles Ives's Fourth Symphony. I went to the showing in part because I played in that orchestra under Stokowski when I was still a student at Barnard College. Although I hadn't yet joined the ASO when the performance was taped in 1965, soon afterward I got my first steady gig there, and I played in the cello section when we recorded Ives's *Robert Browning Overture*.

Both performances were recorded during the early morning hours in the Manhattan Center Studios on West 34th Street. The players were freelancers and students, and the only time when everyone could make the recording dates was after midnight—when the Broadway shows went dark. Watching the video four decades later, I was pleased to see my colleagues as they looked then. Concertmaster Murray Adler played the violin solo with such fine precision. The camera panned to Tony Miranda, the great horn player who died a few years ago. It then moved to the splendid timpanist Elaine Jones, an African American whose very presence as a woman in the percussion section was highly unusual—and a woman timpanist was unheard of. There was Joe Rabbai, who later played principal clarinet in many orchestras. And James Carter, young and handsome, playing second violin; James retired from the National Symphony about six years ago. There were my cellist friend Barbara Reisman and the old cellist I sat next to, so charming. His name was Mischa . . .

What impressed me most, however, was Stokowski himself. I've performed with many conductors over the years, but none had a surer sense of sound. Stokowski was with us on every note. He never "beat time" (his trademark was conducting without a baton, and he had beautiful, expressive hands) or ignored what was happening on stage. Orchestras can be like military organizations, but Stokowski's approach was to invite, not command. He was more a mentor than a general. Stokowski's orchestras operated under the principle of "free bowing," which meant that everyone watched the conductor and had an individual relationship with him and with the music. The job of a principal string player was only to play solos, not to direct the section in any way. The result was a uniquely shimmering sound—the "Stokowski sound." I found out just how strict his rules were when someone who was playing principal cello for a week made a bowing suggestion to me. Suddenly panicked at the

Janet Frank, as a member of the NSO, has played under such great conductors as Claudio Abbado, Leonard Bernstein, Kurt Sanderling, and Sir George Solti.

thought that Stokowski might hear of such an indiscretion, the poor man immediately wrote me a letter of apology.

Stokowski's unconventional seating arrangement also contributed to the extraordinary sound. The string section sat en masse, the basses lined up against the back wall to his left, the cellos forming a line in front of them, the violas holding center stage, and the first and second violins in their usual spot to his immediate left. All the "f" holes in the instruments therefore faced the audience. The woodwinds were to his right, and the brass and percussion were in the center in the back. One benefit was that each musician could hear all the orchestral voices more distinctly.

"A pretty young cellist . . . started things off by walloping a solid single."

Stokowski brought not only real joy to music making but also a sense of theater. He always showed up to concerts in his chauffeur-driven 1920s or early 1930s Packard—at least that's the way I remember it—and his clothes were reliably immaculate. Fans of Walt Disney's 1940 *Fantasia* may also recall the maestro's distinctive accent. In one scene Mickey Mouse calls out to the conductor, "Mr. Stokowski, Mr. Stokowski," and, getting his attention, says, "Congratulations, Mr. Stokowski." Stokowski shakes Mickey's hand and replies, "Congratulations to you, Mickey." The *Fantasia* voice, slow and deliberate, with an unidentifiable old-world flavor, was all the more peculiar because Stokowski was a Londoner by upbringing. When we addressed him directly, we always called him Maestro; but behind his back, we called him Stokie. Rumor had it that his original name was Leo Stokes, although there is evidence to refute that piece of gossip. Changing names has not been uncommon among English-speaking artists. For instance, Stokowski's first wife, the pianist Olga Samaroff, was originally named Lucy Mary Olga Agnes Hickenlooper. The great Canadian cellist Zara Nelsova started out life as Sarah Nelson.

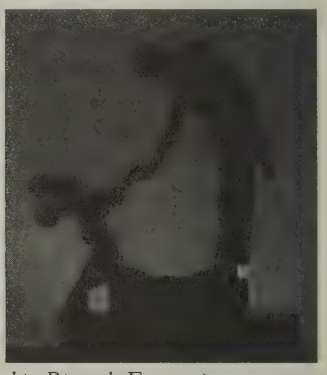
Under Stokowski, the focus wasn't just on music. One day at rehearsal he suggested we have a softball game, girls against boys. The game took place on a beautiful spring day in Central Park's Sheep Meadow near the Tavern on the Green, and the teams were divided into Beethoven's Bunnies and Wolf's Gang. Stokowski, impeccably dressed in a proper afternoon suit with tie, threw out the first ball and umpired. Because he was always interesting to the news people in New York, reporters for *Time, Newsweek,* and *The New York Times* showed up, and I got a review in *Time* that still makes me smile: "A pretty young cellist . . . started things off by walloping a solid single." Unfortunately, things went downhill from there, and I was thrown out at second. But Stokowski yelled, "Safe!" and curiously no one argued. Afterward, music critic Theodore Strongin found me and conducted a decidedly rocky interview. Strongin: "Hi, I'm Ted Strongin of *The New York Times.*" Me: "Are you a sports writer?" Strongin: "No. What do you play?" Me: "Catcher." Strongin: "I mean what instrument?" Me: "Oh." I didn't appear in the *Times.*

I still have the T-shirt I wore in the game. It shows a picture of Stokowski, hand drawn by one of the ASO violinists, Cecily Carter, and bears the words "Do better!" Stokowski used this phrase often during rehearsals, and it still sticks with me. My second memento from the game is a photograph of Stokowski holding a bat and glove. It's signed "Para Janet, Leopold Stokowski" (simple English would have seemed too plain), an inscription that required a bit of persistence on my part. "When we are alone," he'd replied to me the first time I asked him to sign the picture. Later in the season I asked him again. "You do not know what it means to be alone," he said.

Things were a lot less formal back then. My audition, for instance, took place in Stokowski's Fifth Avenue apartment, a block south of the Guggenheim and overlooking the Central Park Reservoir. Stokowski greeted me at the door and asked me to warm up in the library, where two walls were lined floor to ceil-

ing with his recordings. The audition was standard for the day. I first played a solo work of my own choosing (the Saint-Saëns first cello concerto), and then Stokowski asked me to play some orchestral excerpts, which he conducted. These were Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* Overture and Beethoven's Fifth and Brahms's Second symphonies. I had heard these pieces before at other speeds, but, true to his reputation as a magician, the tempos he chose suddenly seemed like the only ones possible. After this Stokowski examined my cello and talked about its sound, tapping it on the back to point out the resonance. Then he asked if I played Mozart sonatas on the piano. "You should play Mozart sonatas every day," he explained. When I replied that I didn't play the piano, Stokowski said, "If you play them slowly enough you can play Mozart sonatas." I discovered that he was right.

Today, auditions are as impartial as possible. Players perform anonymously behind a screen, which unfortunately precludes an auditioning



Stokowski in the author's inscribed photograph; in an earlier publicity shot; and in Disney's Fantasia

string player from getting a firsthand experience with a great conductor until, perhaps, the final round.

Working under less formal conditions brought some startling moments. I occasionally received unexpected telephone calls from the maestro, usually in the morning. "Miss Frank, I have seen the vertical viola," he informed me in one such call, referring to a recently invented type of viola that's held on the floor like a cello. "I would like to have such an instrument in my orchestra, and I would like you to learn the vertical viola." For a young cellist, this was a bit frightening, especially at 8:00 A.M. Doing my best to think up a flexible response, I replied, "Maestro, that sounds very interesting. I am not too good at reading the alto clef, though." Stokowski was unmoved. "Oh that won't be difficult," he assured me. "Come and talk to me at the next rehearsal, and we'll see how to get you one." I did as I was told, but, luckily for me, the maestro had lost interest by then.

During the two years I played in the ASO, there were many one-of-a-kind moments. One day we played a concert at Carnegie Hall for members of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Applause broke out after the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and a few people who knew the custom of not applauding until after the entire symphony is played shushed those who were clapping. Stokowski turned around and spoke to the audience, "Thank you for applauding. I am happy you enjoyed the first movement. I don't see why you should not applaud if you are happy with how we are playing." That was a kindness to those in the audience who may have been embarrassed, and a lesson in humility to those of us (who may have been smiling) up on the stage.

Stokowski loved to be involved in more than just conducting at Carnegie Hall. The new concert hall at the Felt Forum—now the theater at Madison Square Garden—was inaugurated by the ASO, and Alexis Weissenberg was the soloist in the Rachmaninoff *Variations on a Theme of Paganini.* Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra had played the first performance of that and other works for piano and orchestra by Rachmaninoff, with

Rachmaninoff himself as the soloist.

The maestro put his mark on our concerts for children as well. Even though he didn't often conduct them himself—usually they were assigned to assistant conductors Joseph Egger or David Katz—the theatrical aspect made his influence evident. When we played "Hoedown" from Aaron Copland's *Rodeo* ballet score, a couple of dancers performed at the front of the stage. Our *Pictures at an Exhibition* was, of course, the Stokowski orchestration of Modest Mussorgsky's masterpiece for piano. The wonderful orchestral colors make it a worthy alternative to Maurice Ravel's arrangement. During these performances, lots of images were projected on Carnegie Hall's stage wall. One time we heard shrieks of laughter the moment swimming sperm cells were projected to illustrate the "Ballet of the Chicks in the Shells," and we knew that kids from the Bronx School of Science were sitting out there.

When I recall what I loved about Stokowski and conductors like him, I have to admit that there were also drawbacks. Forty years ago was just about the end of the age of such autocratic conductors as Fritz Reiner, George Szell, and the volcanic Arturo Toscanini. (In a fit of pique, Toscanini was reputed to have destroyed a gold watch that had been presented to him by his orchestra. His method of destruction, which took place during a rehearsal when the orchestra failed to meet his expectations, was to throw it down on the podium and jump on it.) Stokowski fit into this tradition. We knew we had to be at the rehearsal at least a half-hour early, since Stokowski would always be sitting at the podium writing down who was there practicing and who was not. (Cellist Charlotte Moorman always arrived before I did, at least until she lost her job after she was arrested for playing bare breasted in a performance of avant-garde music.) And we quickly learned to adapt to his tastes. One morning he was studying the violin section from front to back and said, "We have determined that the Heifetz mute is the best mute to use. I see that some of you already are playing with the Heifetz mute. That is good. Of course which mute you use is your decision, but—*we* make decisions too!"

It was easy to cross him. Once, Stokowski was annoyed that a certain woodwind passage sounded off-key and wondered aloud, "What is the matter with this?" A violinist on the second stand murmured, "The second clarinet is flat." Stokowski, who overheard her, did not like to be told. The next rehearsal found the violinist in the back of the section, and, soon, in no section at all.

I made one risky decision myself. When we played the Heitor Villa-Lobos *Bachianas Brasileiras no. 5* for eight cellos and soprano, the cello section was seated at stage right near the wall and the soprano stood at stage left next to Stokowski, out of our line of sight and optimal hearing. During a rehearsal intermission, I asked Stokowski if it would be possible for the singer to stand on his other side instead. He looked surprised that I had asked such a question. Luckily, though, he smiled and, in that *Fantasia* voice (in which definite articles were often inexplicably omitted), said, "Yes, we can try that. But, when all else fails, watch conductor." I wasn't fired.

With Stokowski holding so much power to hire and fire musicians, turnover in the American Symphony was high—sometimes as high as 30 percent between concerts. We received contracts for only one or two concert weeks, sometimes four, and never more than six. The union didn't really act to protect players from being fired, because everyone knew that Stokowski could just walk away. But we also knew that he was creating jobs for more than a hundred musicians.

In today's orchestras, such tyrant maestros are a thing of the past. I can't imagine a music director at the National Symphony impulsively calling young players at eight in the morning. Stopping a rehearsal to suggest a baseball game between men and women would be seen as preposterous. And today unions keep orchestra members from suddenly losing their jobs. The new maestros understand today's rules and customs, and that's probably for the best. Still, I can't help missing Stokowski. The musician in me thinks of how great Stokowski could make an orchestra sound and wonders if we'll ever see another conductor like him. ❖

BOOKS

The Historical Present

Robert Fagles's bold solutions to the problems of Virgil

Review by A. E. Stallings

THE AENEID
By Virgil
Translated by
Robert Fagles
Viking | $40

Thomas Jefferson's assertion that "every generation needs a new revolution" has long been adopted by translators; it is a commonplace that every generation needs a new Homer, a new Virgil, a new Dante. If that is so, we are in need of a new *Aeneid*. Robert Fitzgerald's elegant rendition of *The Aeneid*, the standard text, has been the reigning champion for more than 20 years and can buy a drink without getting carded. Robert Fagles, after his acclaimed translations of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, has now turned his attention to this more problematic work. The shopworn copy of blurbers, "long-awaited," leans, for once, in the direction of understatement.

The Aeneid seems to be something major translators turn to only when they have run out of Homer or Dante and still need something meaty to get their chops into. This was not always the case. *The Aeneid* holds a special place in the history of English translation. The Earl of Surrey invented blank verse—unrhymed iambic pentameter—for his translation of books 2 and 4 in the mid-1550s. And Dryden's translation of *The Aeneid* (1697) remains an unmatched achievement. Its opening, "Arms, and the man I sing," is itself a famous quotation, as the title of Wilfred Owen's poem, "Arms and the Boy" suggests. Dryden's beginning has the advantage of a word-for-word metaphrase of the Virgil—"Arma virumque cano"—and in the same rhythm too. Avoiding Dryden, as translators are tempted to do, is bound to take one further from the Latin. (In modern translations, Stanley Lombardo, 2005, hews closest, with "Arms I sing—and a man.") Fagles's opening, "Wars and a man I sing" is both rhythmically familiar and shocking; with "Wars," Fagles gives notice that this will be a violent *Aeneid* from its in-medias-res beginning to its open-ended finish.

The Homeric epics, composed in an impersonal style honed by anonymous bards, are arguably easier to translate than Virgil, who is subjective even at his most public. Just on a technical level, Homer's Greek hexameters skim polysyllabically along, while Latin, lacking Greek's articles and particles, has a greater grammatical density. It takes Fitzgerald, for instance, eight lines to convey Virgil's first four. In expanding for clarity, compression is lost, the spring that sets Virgil's poem into its relentless motion. Fagles's solution, as in his Homer translations, is to allow for a variable line—while most weigh in at five beats, they may extend to six or even seven, and condense to three or four. This vers libre eschews

A. E. Stallings, an American poet who lives in Athens, Greece, is the author of *Hapax*, a new collection of poems. Her translation of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* will appear this year.

the padding and omissions that are the hallmarks of so much verse translation, without resorting to prose. There are a startling number of prose translations of the poem, as suggested by one ad that flashed up on Google: "The Aeneid as a Novel: Finally! No more tedious poetry."

No film version of *The Aeneid* springs to mind; one cannot picture Brad Pitt taking up the role of Aeneas. Yet *The Aeneid* is often strikingly cinematic, much of it written, as Bernard Knox and Fagles both write in their flanking essays, not in the past tense of narration, but in the historical present, so that the action often unfolds before our eyes in close-ups and graphic slow motion. Fagles boldly chooses to render Virgil's historical present in the present tense more consistently than most other modern translations. (Allen Mandelbaum's from 1971, is an exception.) The received wisdom about the historical present is that it makes a narrative more vivid and gripping. But it also makes for a curious stasis. Nothing happens; rather, it is always in the process of happening. In English, the present tense is the tense of anecdotes ("then she says to me . . ."), jokes ("a man walks into a bar"), and lyric poems ("Whose woods these are I think I know"), but it is not generally how we describe action, unless we are a sports announcer. We think in the present tense when we are in the midst of something so wonderful or horrific we cannot believe it is really happening. We do not live in the present tense so much as relive in it—replaying memories or nightmares. *The Aeneid* also has this effect on us—as if we are in a particularly vivid nightmare. The gods are able to turn their eyes away from the violence and horror; we are not.

Aeneas's epithet is famously "pious," which, as the scholars would remind us, does not have the priggishness in Latin that it does in English and refers to a range of obligations not only to the gods but also to family and fatherland. Fagles's neat rendering of this is "Aeneas, duty-bound." It is often said that Aeneas is an unsympathetic hero. But if he makes us uncomfortable, it is perhaps because we understand him all too well. Achilles and Odysseus are arguably no more likable; but their actions are consistent with a distant heroic world. Aeneas is a man torn between what he wants to do and what he has to do: a modern conflict. Even "correct" decisions—such as leaving Dido—are fraught with guilt. Homeric heroes act out of concern for their own fame and glory—for a song and a name. Aeneas struggles for the fame of his descendants and for a nation that does not yet exist. The success of Aeneas is also a kind of annihilation—the assimilation of his language and culture.

It is often said that Aeneas is an unsympathetic hero. But if he makes us uncomfortable, it is perhaps because we understand him all too well.

Besides problems of style, there is the larger problem of a poem that has "palpable designs on us." Almost from the beginning of its existence, the poem has been a school text. While Homer is translated for its own sake, the translation of Virgil has been an act of piety (the hobby of many a Victorian village pastor). A translator may feel he is colluding in Augustan spin; equally, translators have felt that their translations are subversive acts of protest against empire, ancient and contemporary. *The Aeneid* has been enlisted by everybody from Christian fathers to royalists to anti-royalists to fascists. (Mussolini subsidized the publication of *The Aeneid*.) In short, we feel that the poem does have a message, even if, millennia later, it is not entirely clear what that is. As Virgil was too great a poet to be entirely co-opted into the Augustan publicity machine, so he resists our own efforts to make him speak for us. Augustus's empire promised an age of peace and prosperity unprecedented in the ancient world, and it came to an Italy bled dry by strife, unrest, and civil war. Yet as scholars remind us, the poet consistently evokes more sympathy for Rome's enemies than for its legendary ancestor, whether "tragic" Dido, valiant Turnus, or even the atheist Mezentius, whose bravery,

Robert Fagles

affection for his trusty horse, and fierce love for his son give his godlessness a noble humanity.

In the grand major chords that swell for the grandeur that is Rome, the poet strikes unsettling dissonances. In the Underworld, Aeneas's father, Anchises, shows his son a parade of great Romans yet to be born, and we see, in this procession, the unfolding of history. The epic traditionally is timeless, set in the distant heroic past; *The Aeneid* is instead timeful, looking forward and backward like Janus, not only back to Rome's ancestor, but forward to his legendary descendants (to the Roman reader, still pre-history), to contemporary Augustan Rome, and even far into the future. Rome is promised imperium without end. But there will be a heavy price to pay for empire. As Anchises declares:

> Others, I have no doubt
> will forge the bronze to breathe with
> suppler lines,
> draw from the block of marble features
> quick with life,
> plead their cases better, chart with their
> rods the stars
> that climb the sky and foretell the times
> they rise.
> But you, Roman, remember, rule with all
> your power
> the peoples of the earth—these will be
> your arts:
> to put your stamp on the works and ways
> of peace,
> to spare the defeated, break the proud in
> war.

(Virgil coyly omits yielding to the Greeks the palm in poetry.) This passage is echoed in another poem about the price of empire, the much-maligned "White Man's Burden" of Rudyard Kipling. Written in 1899, when the United States acquired the Philippines, it echoes the paternal words of Anchises:

> Take up the White Man's burden—
> Have done with childish days—
> The lightly proffered laurel,
> The easy, ungrudged praise.

Substitute "empire" for "White man" and suddenly we start to see the poem for the rueful and prescient work it is. Aeneas would find much to recognize here, particularly the burden of fighting "the savage wars of peace."

Strangely, after this hymn to Rome's future greatness, Aeneas leaves the Underworld through the Gates of Dreams. These gates are mentioned by Penelope in *The Odyssey,* but with the matter-of-factness of folklore: dreams that will come to pass are sent through the gates of horn, false dreams to delude mortals through the gates of ivory. Virgil makes the gates actual physical features of the Underworld, the horn gates for true shades, the ivory for false dreams. Perhaps Aeneas cannot leave through the gates of horn, not being a shade at all. There can be no doubt that the parade of future Romans is full of genuine compliments to Augustus, in front of whom Virgil recited this book, such as the immortalizing of his nephew Marcellus, who died young. But the ambiguity did not have to be introduced. Aeneas departs through the gates of false dreams, and we are left to puzzle the consequences.

Caution: plot spoiler ahead.

Anchises's advice from the Underworld comes back to bear on the end of the poem. Virgil died before completing his revision of the work. (He had wanted three more years to "lick it into shape.") But that does not mean the poem, as it ends, with the duel of Aeneas and Turnus, is in any way "unfinished." Virgil first plotted the poem out as prose, then versified it. Thus, the ending must be assumed to be what Virgil intended. Turnus is fated to die. Yet Aeneas's decision not "to spare the defeated," but to kill him, and in the passion of rage and revenge, is a startling act of free will in a poem of Stoic resignation to destiny. It is not the fact but the mode of Turnus's death that sends its ripples back through the poem.

Fagles is at his best in the heat and gore of battle, his footing less sure in sublime moments where his accentual line can lack the stateliness molded by a more regular measure. The conclusion is among the most vivid parts of the translation. Aeneas has held back his right arm, considering Turnus's plea for mercy. But suddenly seeing on Turnus the spoils of Pallas, a young friend whose death at Turnus's hands nearly unhinged Aeneas earlier, he cries out:

> "Pallas strikes this blow, Pallas sacrifices you now,
> makes you pay the price with your own guilty blood!"
> In the same breath, blazing with wrath he plants
> his iron sword hilt-deep in his enemy's heart.

The effect here of the present tense in English almost has the immediacy of stage directions.

While the poem ends in a decisive blaze of rage, the language of Virgil keeps ambiguity in play. When Aeneas slays Turnus, the verb Virgil uses is *condit. Condere* means both "to bury" and "to found." (Roman dates, for instance, are given a.u.c., *ab urbe condita*, "from the founding of the city.") It is an act of destruction that is also an act of creation. Fagles demonstrates here, as elsewhere, that he is alive to the metaphorical multivalence of the Latin; so that when Aeneas "plants" his sword in Turnus's chest, he also plants the Roman empire. I cannot think of a more perfect way in English to convey this two-edged word. Yet another reminder that in this lively and accurate translation, students, new readers, and readers returning to this cornerstone of Western civilization will not have to choose, as poor Aeneas did, between duty and pleasure.

Pleasure out of Desperation

Thomas Eakins, yearning for the ideal in a materialistic age

Review by Brenda Wineapple

PORTRAIT
The Life of Thomas Eakins
By William S. McFeely
W. W. Norton
$26.95

In the spring of 1887 Thomas Eakins, 42 years old, met Walt Whitman face-to-face at the Good Gray Poet's home in Camden, New Jersey, just across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, Eakins's hometown. Shrewd and generous, the poet immediately sized up the painter, 25 years his junior: "careless, negligent, indifferent, quiet: you would not say retiring, but amounting to that." And he liked the younger man. "I never . . . knew [but] one artist," Whitman later said, "and that's Tom Eakins, who could resist the temptation to see what they think ought to be, rather than what is."

That Eakins was a portrait painter of brutal realism yearning, Whitman-like, "for something that reached beyond comfort and progress," a kind of empyrean ideal unfettered by the materialism of modern life, is the central conceit of William S. McFeely's succinct *Portrait: The Life of Thomas Eakins.* McFeely, Pulitzer Prize–winning biographer of Ulysses S. Grant and Frederick Douglass, takes a page from F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance,* with its brilliant comparison of Eakins and Whitman, to sketch Eakins as a transcendentalist fellow traveler, humanely attempting to represent in art a vision of individual freedom that included, without apology, the corporeal

Brenda Wineapple, the author most recently of *Hawthorne: A Life,* is completing a book on Emily Dickinson. She is a member of the editorial board of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

and the sensual. Like Emerson and Melville, Eakins was, according to McFeely, "one of the nineteenth century's remarkable seekers."

Born in Philadelphia in 1844, Thomas Cowperthwait Eakins was the eldest child of a calligrapher who invested wisely (no one knows in what, though McFeely speculates that it was in real estate or railroads), and provided amply for his only son. He financed, for example, the young man's trip, de rigueur, to Paris in 1866, where Eakins managed to study with the popular academic painter, Jean-Léon Gérôme at the hallowed Écoles des Beaux-Arts, and to Spain, where he was bowled over by the paintings of Diego Velázquez. Before that, Eakins had attended Philadelphia's top-ranked Central High School, taken anatomy courses at the Jefferson Medical College, and, during the Civil War, studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. But during the war years, Eakins dropped out of sight. "It is difficult for an American historian to imagine nothing happening between 1861 and 1865," McFeely admits, "but for this story I may have to. I am not the first writer to despair at finding anything beyond bits and scraps and conjectures about what Thomas Eakins was up to between the age of seventeen and twenty-one."

Detail from Max Schmitt in a Single Scull *by Thomas Eakins: painting a more perfect world*

Had Eakins paid for a substitute to take his place on the battlefield, as the sons of many affluent families did? If so, how did he feel about it? McFeely, a historian, confronts the imponderables directly, weaving them deftly into a brisk cultural narrative, and he handles with aplomb the large question confronting an Eakins biographer in the 21st century, the matter of Eakins's sexuality. "To ignore that dimension of Eakins' life would be to have only a partial person in view," McFeely writes without undue fuss. "To view it as the single important factor in his life does the same disservice." Diplomatically, McFeely refutes both the ultra-Freudian reading of Eakins's life in art historian Henry Adams's *Eakins Revealed: The Secret Life of An American Artist* (2005) and the quaint denial of homosexuality in Lloyd Goodrich's pioneering 1933 biography of the artist.

Instead, McFeely, speculating that most of Eakins's friends in Paris were homosexual, remarks almost with resignation, "Homosexuality. That word, despite our somewhat self-righteous liberality, still sprinkles itching powder over any discussion of Eakins." This biographer scratches lightly, suggesting that Eakins, physically more attracted to men than women, explored his sexuality in bohemian Paris and, once back in Philadelphia, in paintings like the famous *Swimming Hole* (1885), with its silent cry, as McFeely notes, for a more perfect world. This more perfect world is one of beautiful men in sunlight, outdoors, even though in buttoned-up Philadelphia, this world could not exist for long.

As an athletic outdoorsman, Eakins found solace by painting men in nature—rowing on the Schuylkill River, fishing on the Delaware—with the breadth, vibrancy, and openness (or the dream of it) not to be found in his inward-turning family portraits. (Eakins's mother died in 1872, the victim of a bipolar disorder, which Eakins may have inherited; McFeely affords some evidence for a reasonable, if armchair, diagnosis.) This, to McFeely, is Eakins's paradox: the painter hungers for the spiritual freedom expressed by antebellum writers such as Thoreau (whom Eakins may or may not have read), and yet over and over he rubs up against the harsh postwar reality of diminished expectations: a benighted

public, the anti-indecency obsessions of Anthony Comstock, Eakins' own pervasive sense of failure.

Yet he was also a craftsperson intent on perfecting form, not subverting it as Whitman did. He sought freedom within structure, not outside it. With the exactitude of an engineer, Eakins scrupulously measured the angles of the scull depicted in canvases such as *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake-Boat.* In fact, his attention to proportion, ratio, and scientific measurement actually suggests to the reader a nonromantic metaphor for art that unfortunately McFeely doesn't explore. In the remarkable *Gross Clinic* (1875, recently sold to the National Gallery of Art and Crystal Bridges Museum), for instance, the eponymous surgeon, a bloody red scalpel in his upraised hand, symbolizes the minute precision with which the artist must wield his brush if he, too, is to master life and death. Not surprisingly, Eakins judged it his most important work—today many viewers agree—but Philadelphia gentry balked, and during the City of Brotherly Love's Centennial Exposition in 1876, *The Gross Clinic* was shuffled off to a side building.

A beloved teacher, Eakins taught at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, at first without pay, where he demanded anatomical correctness. He brought cadavers into the studio; he believed in drawing from human models, not plaster casts; and he bought himself a camera to intensify the reality of his own productions. Because Eakins was intrigued by Eadweard Muybridge's experiments in motion, he was appointed to oversee Muybridge's academy commission; while Eakins did this, he conducted experiments of his own and built a wheel camera to capture the motion of men running or vaulting. In the studio, he photographed naked students wrestling in athletic poses: "pansexual heat glowed in dim rooms that smelled of dust and varnish," observed the art critic Peter Schjeldahl when reviewing the 2001 retrospective of Eakins's work organized by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. McFeely is more circumspect, but in this case a bit too diffident, especially given the theme of his own book, when he concludes that "no

Brother Salvage

by Rick Hilles

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"The poems in *Brother Salvage* are the traffic between worlds—between past and present, self and other, beauty and horror. These are passionate acts of retrieval—deeply intelligent and superbly graceful, they bring us news of the human wherever it survives, 'alive and at the brink of shattering.'"

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attempt to read philosophy into these bizarre pictures is convincing."

Following his dismissal from the stuffy academy in 1886, ostensibly for removing a male model's loincloth in full view of female students, Eakins was accused of far more heinous crimes: his youngest sister's husband, it seems, had organized a campaign of slander that included an allegation of Eakins being in a homosexual relationship with a student. By then married to one of his prize students, the painter Susan Macdowell, Eakins was distraught, his family torn, his self-confidence shredded. Taking temporary refuge in the open hills of Dakota Territory—the romantic anodyne for scandal and depression—Eakins slowly recovered, but his paintings darkened, and even in his loving portrait of Whitman, completed in 1888, sufferance and sadness subtly humanize the grand old man.

Taking temporary refuge in the open hills of Dakota Territory, Eakins slowly recovered, but his paintings darkened, and even in his loving portrait of Whitman, completed in 1888, sufferance and sadness subtly humanize the grand old man.

Later, Eakins's friendship with the handsome sculptor Samuel Murray and their shared interest in bicycle riding and boxing brought renewed pleasure—and probably passion—into Eakins's life. Admiring Susan Eakins's remarkable understanding of her husband's conflicted needs, McFeely hints that she may have satisfied her own desire for comfort and companionship, if not sexual gratification, when the unmarried Mary Adeline Williams came to live with the couple; Williams is the subject of one of Eakins's most heart-wrenching portraits. By then, as McFeely astutely points out, even Eakins's paintings of boxers and boxing are fragrant with lost hope: "Thomas Eakins was seeking pleasure out of weary desperation, not in affirmation." Gone are the idylls of boat races and virile young men.

In 1899 Eakins painted an unsparing portrait of Susan, her face tipped to the right, as if she were listening carefully; but set against an unlit background, she's cut off from time and place and other people. (His greatest portraits show his subjects in the clutches of a relentless middle age.) As McFeely persuasively reads it, Eakins saw himself in this searingly unsentimental picture of his wife, their mutual sorrow captivating, unabashed, unadorned, and abjectly human. And this is what Whitman must have meant when he called Eakins a force, not a painter. As a force, Eakins's work both represents and belies the times that produced it. "It was not, in the end, simply [that] the nineteenth century had let Eakins down, but that it had let America down," McFeely piquantly concludes, his argument rising to a pitch. "Eakins himself had not failed, as his self-scorn would have it. It was his

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nineteenth century that, at its close, failed him." Maybe so; McFeely is a most credible narrator, inviting us to believe—and, better yet, to observe—that whatever his disappointment, whether with the broken promise of romantic freedom or something far more elusive, Eakins transformed it into an art of tragic grandeur.

Organized Violence

In the last century, where did warfare end and genocide begin?

Review by Charles Trueheart

THE WAR OF THE WORLD
Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West
By Niall Ferguson
Penguin Press | $32.95

How did it come to pass that the 20th century gave us such murderous wars, so many of them, on so grand a scale, inflicting such massive noncombatant death, most of it as deliberate as it was pointless? How is it that seemingly civilized human beings could begin the century in peace and prosperity and plunge almost immediately into such unparalleled warfare and genocide—and a century later, sadder and no wiser, still be at it? And why did so much of the mass murder of the 1900s target and victimize people whose principal transgressions were their religious faith or their physical appearance?

Examining the tragic evidence, detective-historian Niall Ferguson sets out to uncover "the motives behind the murders"—about 175 million of them, by his count. The conundrum of the century is at once the conundrum of the human condition: no matter our enlightenment and our experience, no matter our sense of right and wrong, why are we compelled to exterminate whole populations of people in the name of nations, creeds, and races?

These harrowing questions launch and haunt *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West,* the latest big book from the precocious and astonishingly productive Scottish historian, author of recent major works on the First World War, the British Empire, the American Empire, and *The Cash Nexus: Money and Power in the Modern World, 1700–2000.* Clearly Ferguson is not cowed by the size of any topic, including, here, man's inhumanity to man. But despite the freight of the theme, *The War of the World* should not be confused with a work of anthropology, let alone philosophy. It is, rather, a deeply disturbing chronicle of the last century's grisliest descents into hell, with World War II the black heart of the epoch's seamless shame. He leaves it to us to draw the lessons—and to remain helpless still.

In framing his approach, Ferguson indulges his predilection (as teacher, as popularizer, as maverick) for throwing traditional brackets and universally accepted labels out the window. Such tricks of the trade have helped propel Ferguson's career beyond the walls of the university, notably as public television's latest intellectual emcee. (*The War of the World* is tied to a BBC series, coming to a viewer-supported station near you.)

"It might therefore be said," Ferguson writes (in such frequent throat-clearing phrases we can hear both the professor on autopilot and the occasionally indifferent writer—my only disappointments about the execution of the book),

> that the late 1930s and early 1940s witnessed the crescendo of an entire century of organized violence—a global Hundred Years War. . . . In the end, I have elected to locate the war of the world between two

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Charles Trueheart, a contributing editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, has written on war crimes for *The Washington Post* and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

> dates: 1904, when the Japanese struck the first effective blow against European dominance of the Orient; and 1953, when the end of the Korean War drew a line through the Korean peninsula, matching the Iron Curtain that had already been drawn through Central Europe. But what followed this Fifty Years War was not a "long peace" but what I have called the Third World's War.

Ferguson is keen to explore his own claim that the 20th century was "without question the bloodiest century in history, far more violent in relative as well as absolute terms than any previous era," and so he offers in the British edition an instructive appendix on the subject of numbers—and the nature of violence. Here he coolly asks questions that are as perplexing to the historian as to the moral philosopher:

> Does it require a greater quantity of violence (though I remain unsure in which unit violence should be measured) to kill a hundred people with a machete than with a bomb? Finally, does intention matter? Is it worse to kill people out of racial or religious prejudice than to kill them in pursuit of a strategic objective? Should we allow for the fact that in some cases organized violence is asymmetrically perpetrated against defenseless civilians, while in others it is reciprocally inflicted by well-matched armies? To put it differently, is "genocide" merely a term for a civil war in which only one side is armed?

The statistics are sobering, staggering. Of the century's 167 million to 188 million "deaths by organized violence," nearly 60 million occurred during World War II (between 1939 and 1945). Many more citizens from the Soviet Union died than from any other country—25 million. Poland's mortality rate was the highest of the war—19 percent; Germany-Austria's rate was 10 percent; France, England, the United States, and Italy had a mortality rate of less than *one* percent. (No wonder, in some places, it's called the good war.) By comparison, Pol Pot's reign of butchery in Cambodia, albeit a small country, probably came as close as any other to matching those numbers, with a 10 percent mortality rate. The proportion of people killed in the Congo under Belgian rule may have been as high as 20 percent. Only Genghis Khan in the 13th century killed on such a scale, wiping out 10 percent of the population of the *world*, according to Ferguson's estimates.

Naturally enough, the numbers horrify in indirect proportion to their size, and Ferguson is as attentive to the details as to the broad canvas. He deftly zooms in to put a human face, or an inhuman one, on the bloody statistics—quoting here an Italian reporter's 1941 account of the night of hysteria when 4,000 Romanian Jews were slaughtered.

> Hordes of Jews pursued by soldiers and maddened civilians armed with knives and crowbars fled along the streets; groups of policemen smashed in house doors with their rifle butts; windows opened suddenly and screaming disheveled women in nightgowns appeared with their arms raised in the air; some threw themselves from windows and their faces hit the asphalt with a

FOR THE FIRST TIME, PERHAPS, A TENABLE HISTORY OF JESUS

It won't be found in the Bible. Critical examination of the New Testament Gospels reveals sloppy history, perhaps deliberately deceptive, giving a picture of Jesus more imaginative than factual. Frankly, most Christians seem not to notice or care--transcendentalism spins its own reality. But true realists, for whom accurate history matters, may be pleased with what the recently discovered *Gospel of Thomas* provides: 113 notes taken down by Thomas of perplexing things Jesus said. Such notes were probably made at the times they were heard and have not suffered alteration--the best kind of source for a history.

Jack Hannah in ***You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism*** recognizes the notes as chronologically ordered and correlative with the skeletal history used in the *Gospel of Mark*. Hannah provides all the text of *Thomas* with comments and Marcan context, thereby developing a narrative of Jesus that is tenably historical.

This ***historical*** Jesus based his teaching on the Epicurean philosophy; e.g. in place of Judaism's practices of fasting, praying, almsgiving, and obeying food laws, this ***historical*** Jesus substituted: "Tell no lie and never do what you hate." This ***historical*** Jesus never mentioned a devil, demons, or hell. Epicureanism also shaped Jesus' opinion that God and Caesar are man-made authorities and that one's ultimate authority should be oneself.

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> dull thud. Squads of soldiers hurled hand grenades through the little windows level with the street into the cellars where many people had vainly sought safety; some soldiers dropped to their knees to look at the results of the explosions within the cellars and turned laughing faces to their companions. Where the slaughter had been heaviest the feet slipped in blood; everywhere the hysterical and ferocious toll of the pogrom filled the houses and streets with shot, and weeping, with terrible screams and cruel laughter.

This savagery was the work not of German or Soviet invaders, but of the victims' neighbors, willing and even eager executioners. It was all of a pattern with the century's wars and genocides, and pogroms and gulags—the job could never have been done by the authorities and the soldiers alone. Collaborators always materialized. Societies—in Germany's case one of the most advanced and civilized extant—turned on ethnic minorities that had been among the most fully assimilated in the world, whose rates of intermarriage were high, whose numbers were anything but threatening.

Ferguson, an economic historian by training, is drawn here to evolutionary biology for sharpening our perplexity about humanity's fear of the Other—its need to *invent* the Other when it is not actually there. "All the human DNA in existence today originated with as few as 86,000 individuals," he notes.

> Around 85 percent of the total amount of genetic variation in humans occurs among individuals in an average population; only 6 percent occurs between races. The genetic variants that affect skin color, hair type and facial features involved an insignificant amount of the billions of nucleotides in an individual's DNA. To some biologists, this means that, strictly speaking, human races do not exist.

Rape has been an instrument of violence for as long as there have been wars, but for Ferguson it is also—today's received wisdom once again tossed aside—a display of biological attraction. The organized policy of rape that went along with the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Serbs

One participant in the global Hundred Years War

by their fellow non-Muslim Serbs in the early 1990s—to name only one recent instance of this heritage of oppression—bespeaks for Ferguson the duality of human nature. We lust for what we want to kill. "Freud's analysis went to the elusive heart of hatred itself," Ferguson writes, "by capturing its essential ambivalence—its combination of *Eros* and *Thanatos*, of the sexual and the morbid." When Einstein asked Freud to join a high-minded effort to promote world peace, Freud replied that the destructive instinct would forever struggle against the erotic one and was, in some sense, an expression of it. "Why do we, you and I and many another, protest so vehemently against war, instead of just accepting it as another of life's odious importunities? For it seems a natural enough thing, biologically sound and practically unavoidable."

Among the reasons for Niall Ferguson's outsized renown are his age (born in 1964 and thus still plausibly young), his output (a book every 18 months for a decade, a weekly newspaper column, television productions, and presumably some teaching), his politics (pugnaciously Tory), and his intellectual ambition. He once said to the Canadian journalist Robert Fulford: "What's the point of having knowledge about modern history if you confine yourself to writing monographs for Oxford University Press?" As a consequence, Ferguson may have found that the popularizer is never honored in his own faculty club—his

FROM THE BOOK JACKET, COURTESY OF THE PENGUIN PRESS

club being in business class over the Atlantic Ocean or in the American heartland; he holds faculty appointments at Harvard and Oxford and the Hoover Institution.

Ferguson's training was not all academic, and it's telling in his work. As a young Ph.D. candidate in Hamburg, working on his dissertation and first book (on German inflation), Ferguson used an assumed name and a disguised photograph to write string for the *Daily Mail,* knowing that his academic confreres would be scandalized if he were known to dabble in journalism. The rubric of the provocative generalization supported by the choice of only the most-telling facts and anecdotes may seem a self-evident choice for any scholar; if only it were so. But by any standard Ferguson is an unusually impressive narrator. He can charge confidently, even hastily, across wars and cabinet conflicts, stitching currency trading to naval maneuvers to personal peccadilloes; he can sketch a tyrant, pause to take you inside the cockpit of an RAF bombing run over wartime Germany, move on to thrash out competing balance-of-payments arguments, before taking a side trip into Nazi architecture and symbolism.

Here's a sample of Ferguson's brisk and pungent style as he introduces the reader to Adolf Hitler:

> An art-school reject who had once scraped a living by selling kitschy picture postcards; an Austrian draft-dodger who had ended up a decorated Bavarian corporal; a lazy mediocrity who rose late and enjoyed both Wagner's operas and Karl May's cowboy yarns—here indeed was an unlikely heir to the legacy of Frederick the Great and Otto von Bismarck. . . . [Some] thought he looked more like 'a man trying to seduce the cook' or perhaps a renegade tram conductor. If it had not been for the advice of his publisher Max Amann, he would have called his first book *Four and a Half Years of Struggle against Lies, Stupidity and Cowardice* instead of the distinctly catchier *My Struggle*. . . . As for his sexuality, about which there has long been speculation on the basis of circumstantial or tainted evidence, he may have had none. Hitler hated. He did not love.

"Why do we, you and I and many another, protest so vehemently against war, instead of just accepting it as another of life's odious importunities?"

Please, Niall, tell us what you *really* think. Ferguson is known for championing the counterfactual; he edited a book, *Virtual History* (1997), that lent some scholarly weight to a mode of analysis that my old professors used to dismiss as "what-if" history, but unquestionably engages anyone who thinks about the complex machinery of fate—that is, history. In *The War of the World,* accordingly, Ferguson constantly and, for me, endearingly points out roads not taken, roads not noticed, could-haves and should-haves. He lectures his long-dead forebears on the bungling negligence of their misjudgments and speculates on happier outcomes had they only acted, by his lights or hindsight's, rationally. It follows that Ferguson adores confronting accepted readings of historic turning points, relishing the chance to make a convincing case *for* appeasement of Nazi Germany in 1939 and, elsewhere, mocking the stupidity of British generals: "By 1935, incredibly, they were so convinced of their own hopeless vulnerability that they did not even dare fight the Italian navy. In 1938 the Chiefs of Staff ruled out even 'staff conversations' with the French, since the very term 'has a sinister purport and gives an impression . . . of mutually assumed military collaboration.' Perish the thought!" The Yanks are not spared. Ferguson dismisses the American fighting men in World War II as "significantly less well-trained than their opponents," adding the following poke: "The 'greatest generation' may have been greater than other American generations; they were far from being the greatest warriors of World War II." Cheeky.

And gloomy, too, from beginning to end.

> H. G. Wells had imagined a "War of the Worlds"—a Martian invasion that devastated the earth. In the hundred years that followed, men proved that it was quite possible to wreak comparable havoc without the need for alien intervention. . . .
>
> The War of the World is, however, historical fact. Perhaps, like Wells's story, ours will be ended abruptly by the intervention of microscopic organisms like the avian influenza virus. . . . Until that happens, however, we are our own worst enemies.

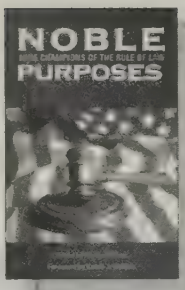
Ferguson stops short of addressing the catastrophic United States invasion of Iraq and the terrifying tribal war it has rekindled, but his conclusion holds. Among the violent zealotry of the toppled dictator, the violent zealotry of the foreign invaders, and the violent zealotry of the domestic sectarians, the competition for worst enemy is stiff.

Poised Between the Ancient and the New

ISAAC B. SINGER: A Life. *By Florence Noiville, translated from the French by Catherine Temerson, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $23*

Isaac Bashevis Singer, the last great Yiddish writer, used a dying language of exile to recreate a lost world. A descendant of seven generations or more of rabbis, he was born in 1904 into a poor, austere family in which, Singer later said, "the eternal questions were more actual than the latest news in the Yiddish newspaper." His father convened a rabbinical court at home, crowded by yeshiva students, simpletons, beggars, and penitents seeking advice or wanting a marriage or divorce.

Life outside the apartment, meanwhile, was not less exciting for the red-headed boy. Singer grew up on Krochmalna Street in Warsaw, a teeming place where he could take in the din and clamor of a culture in its twilight. Even more than the books, sacred and profane, that



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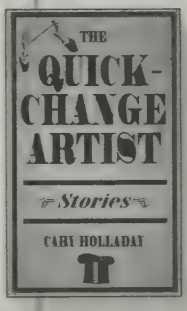

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came to nurture him—the Torah, the Talmud, Spinoza, Tolstoy, Knut Hamsun, Edgar Allan Poe—it was the exuberance of his surroundings that would nourish the future storyteller. "In this world of old Jewishness," Singer wrote, "I found a treasure trove."

And yet, as Florence Noiville shows in her excellent new biography, Singer did not merely curate this treasure; he greatly contributed to its riches. Singer immigrated to America in 1935, leaving behind a mother and younger brother (both were later deported by the Nazis and killed), a wife, and a son he would not see again for 20 years. Upon arrival, he suffered years of writer's block. ("Who needs Yiddish in America?" Singer has one of his autobiographical characters ask himself.) He married Alma Wasserman, who knew no Yiddish, and moved to the Upper West Side, where he lived for more than four decades, lunching with cronies in Broadway cafeterias. After the early death of his talented older brother, the writer Israel Joshua Singer, Isaac increasingly contributed to the *Forward,* the largest Yiddish daily, where most of his novels were serialized.

Florence Noiville

In 1953, Saul Bellow translated Singer's short story "Gimpel the Fool" and got it published in *Partisan Review,* whereupon Singer was "discovered" by an English-speaking audience and soon feted. There followed invitations to publish in mass-circulation magazines like *Esquire, Playboy,* and *The New Yorker;* a lucrative deal with the publisher Farrar, Straus and Giroux; successful movie adaptations of *Yentl* and *Enemies, a Love Story;* and, in 1978, a Nobel Prize.

But until his death in 1991, Singer always claimed surprise that anyone would be interested in his stories and the unsettling grotesquerie that peopled them: evil spirits, dybbuks, imps, demons from Gehenna, false messiahs, reincarnated souls, and corpses who do not realize they are dead, not to mention the harlots, heretics, charlatans, philanderers, and lecherous widows.

In fact, some readers weren't all that interested. His first editor complained: "Why write about thieves and whores when there were so many decent Jewish men and devoted Jewish wives?" Other Yiddish writers regarded Singer with suspicion—no doubt tinged with jealousy—for his pagan subjects, the frank carnality of his characters, and the ways he sacrificed authenticity to pander to his American readers. The Yiddish journalist Heshl Klepfish called Singer's stories "filth." Elie Wiesel was offended by Singer characters who were "morally deficient . . . sex maniacs." The great Yiddish author Chaim Grade went so far as to call Singer's Nobel "a great tragedy for the Jewish people." (Cynthia Ozick wonderfully captures this bitterness in her story about Singer, "Envy; or, Yiddish in America.")

Singer, in turn, was contemptuous of his colleagues' whorled syntax, their rootlessness, and their socialist, utopian politics; he thought vast tracts of Yiddish literature were "godly without a god, worldly without a world."

Bitterness also characterizes some of the biographies and memoirs about Singer (including those by his son, Israel Zamir, and his nephew Maurice Carr). But Noiville's foremost virtue in this brisk, engaging biography is that she chooses generosity instead. She does not dwell too much on her subject's well-known womanizing, misanthropy, egoism, or ingratitude toward his translators and editors. Noiville avoids reducing Singer's work to the products of a troubled neurotic, a temptation indulged by Janet Hadda in her 1997 biography, for instance. (Hadda takes *Satan in Goray,* Singer's first and perhaps finest novel, to be

WILL O'LEARY

largely about "inadequate parental care.")

Noiville is especially good on the ruptures—with religion, with Warsaw, with his son and brother—that characterized the life of a man who remained faithful only to Yiddish, a language scorned by emancipated German Jews and Zionists alike. Despite the excellence of his children's books, and for all his skill with memory, Singer had trouble with the future. He could neither embrace his son nor mentor younger writers; in a sense, Singer immured himself in the past.

Yet oddly, Noiville, a literary editor at *Le Monde,* has not much to say about Singer's stories themselves. What, indeed, makes them so vivid, simple, taut, evocative, and entertaining?

The answer begins with Singer's mastery of the inflections and accents of Eastern European shtetl life—and the poignancy of its death in the Holocaust. The critic Irving Howe once said, "What concerns Singer most of all is the possibilities for life that remain after the exhaustion of human effort, after failure and despair have come and gone." Singer, who called himself "the son of a people who received the worst blows that human madness can inflict," is a virtuoso of catastrophe and calamity, of disintegration and decay—and of resignation.

He is also a master of effortlessly blending the real with the supernatural, the apocalyptic, the fantastic, and—in a century of unreason—the irrational.

But his best stories—like "Gimpel the Fool," "Taybele and Her Demon," "The Spinoza of Market Street," "A Crown of Feathers," "The Gentleman from Cracow," "Yentl the Yeshiva Boy," and "The Little Shoemakers"—are animated by a still deeper kind of blending. Reading them, one often cannot distinguish the old-fashioned from the transgressive, the miraculous from the skeptical. One cannot decide whether they are archaic or original, mystical or disenchanted, traditional folktales or modernist allegories. To achieve this doubleness, Singer raised to art the condition of Yiddish itself, a language tensed between its Hebrew and German elements, and spoken by Jews, like Isaac Bashevis Singer, poised between the ancient and the new.

—Benjamin Balint

What if Nature Had Been Thrifty?

THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS: Mathematics and Destiny. *By Ivar Ekeland, University of Chicago Press, $25*

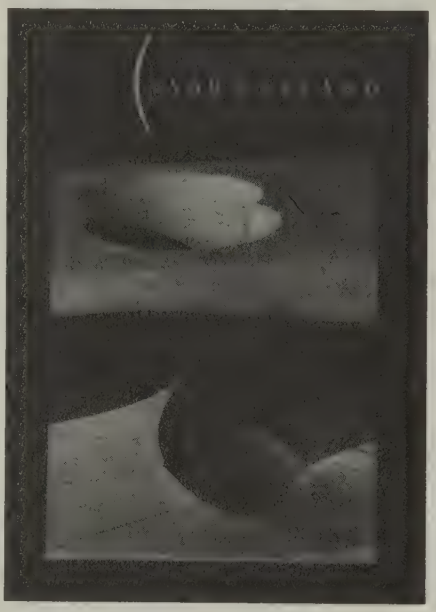
History has not been kind to Pierre-Louis Maupertuis. Voltaire ruined his reputation among his 18th-century contemporaries by skewering him twice, first in the figure of the inane optimist Dr. Pangloss in *Candide* and then as an incompetent plagiarist of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in *The Story of Doctor Akakia and the Native of Saint-Malo.* Now, Ivar Ekeland, an accomplished mathematician and historian of math, calls forth Maupertuis's spirit again, only to banish it the more thoroughly in the context of a broad meditation on the idea that the world we live in might in some sense be optimal.

Maupertuis's major contribution to mathematics is the least-action principle, which he arrived at erroneously, named badly, and failed to apply helpfully. The basic idea is that a body in motion will follow the path that minimizes what Maupertuis called the "quantity of action." The exact nature of this quantity, which relates to the mass and velocity of the object and the distance it travels, is difficult to grasp intuitively, but the metaphysical implications he drew from it are easy to follow. If physical objects act to conserve a quantity, natural laws seem designed to be thrifty. Maupertuis boldly argued that this was direct evidence of the hand of God in the design of the universe and that the same principle writ large suggests that He has also designed the world to be optimal in a moral sense. In short, we must be living in the best of all possible worlds.

By reading metaphysical assumptions into science, Maupertuis fell victim to a philosophical fallacy common among Renaissance mathematicians. The intellectual milieu of the time was not so far removed from the medieval worldview in which Nature was held to be the book of God's work and inquiry into its perfection was a form of worship. The classical model of the pursuit of science, though inspirational in many

respects, was scarcely less metaphorical. Plato conceived science to be the recognition of truths first encountered before birth in the ideal world of the forms (the Greek *theoreia* literally means "things which have been seen"), a semi-secular version of the idea that natural laws reflect perfection of design.

In this context, and into the modern era, greater thinkers than Maupertuis have gazed deep into nature and found purpose in it. Descartes believed he could deduce physical properties from the fact of God's perfection; Einstein rejected quantum uncertainty on the theory that He does not play dice. They all turned out to be wrong: subatomic particles do behave randomly; light actually moves faster in air than in water, contrary to Descartes' deduction; and nature does not in fact act to minimize the quantity of action—although it does sometimes act to hold it constant, and this modified version of Maupertuis's principle was used to good effect when applied more empirically by Henri Poincaré in the 20th century.



As Ekeland moves forward in time, the scientific method gains ascendancy, and his discussion moves away from found optimality (or the lack thereof) and toward the question of active optimization. Here Maupertuis is, in a small way, redeemed, for he appears as the inventor of optimization problems that seek to use equations to maximize or minimize a certain quantity. The world turns out not to be such a problem, but the form has been employed to great effect on a smaller scale. For example, Newton designed an ideal bullet by solving for minimal air resistance, and the field of operations research is founded on optimization theory. The obvious question is whether, having stripped optimization of its metaphysical weight, we can usefully apply it to the ancient philosophical problem of how best to arrange society.

In a brisk, wide-ranging final chapter, which ultimately takes on too much, Ekeland considers and rejects a variety of possible quantities that we might attempt to maximize in order to perfect the human world. Economic efficiency is frighteningly silent on the question of distributive justice; utilitarian social value runs into the problems of asymmetry of information and corruption; and individual preference is limited by the Arrow impossibility theorem, which states that such preferences cannot be aggregated in a perfectly coherent way that is also immune to manipulation.

In the end, Ekeland determines that, although some kind of equilibrium is desirable for consistency's sake, optimization theory cannot help us choose among equilibriums because there is at present no way to define the common good as a maximizable quantity. He nevertheless concludes with a surprising optimism grounded in an almost mystical idea of rationality. By embracing the scientific method deeply, actively, and patiently, Ekeland asserts, we will eventually arrive at entirely new moral conceptions. He closes the books with this quote from Robert Musil:

> The truth is that science has developed the idea of a raw and sober intellectual power which makes mankind's old metaphysical and moral representations simply unbearable, even though it can put in its place no more than a hope: that some day will come, in a long time, when a race of intellectual conquerors will settle in the valleys of spiritual abundance.

How far this vision really is from Maupertuis's is open to debate.

Ekeland's broad range of reference includes Galileo's establishment of time and mo-

tion as measurable, scientific concepts; the philosophy of history set out by Thucydides and Francesco Guicciardini; and the fragile, non-optimal equilibriums described by game theory. It is impossible for Ekeland to do justice to all this in the span of his brief book. (This volume is less focused and ultimately less compelling than his earlier books, *Mathematics and the Unexpected* and *The Broken Dice*.) But if the book's discursive style is sometimes repetitive and occasionally leads into too-familiar territory (the idea that evolution could somehow lead to *better* species is by now a straw man), *The Best of All Possible Worlds* shows throughout the hand of an intelligent, erudite, and witty power. Maupertuis would think he had found God.

—Daniel Reid

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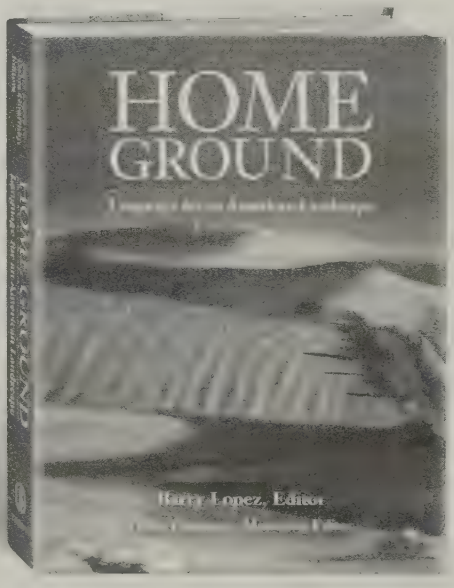

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Going Native

When American literature became good enough for Americans, what happened to the literary canon?

By Morris Dickstein

In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?
—Sydney Smith, 1820

For the longest time American writers got little respect from condescending arbiters of taste abroad or even from literary scholars at home. Professors of English were in thrall to the mother country, with its awesome cultural traditions. Snobs at heart, they saw American literature as little more than a provincial offshoot, decorously genteel but with a handful of talents (Melville, Poe, Whitman) who were almost freakishly original. In *Memoirs of Hecate County,* Edmund Wilson recalled how his teachers at Princeton, just before the First World War, either ignored or patronized American writers. "In those days the English department stopped short with the Victorian age and did not admit the importance of any American writers at all." This began changing soon afterward, but the celebration of our native literary genius has accelerated tremendously in recent decades. Since 1975, when I first started teaching graduate students, I've seen their interests shift dramatically from earlier writers to modern and contemporary ones, from poetry to prose, and from English to American literature. These changes have been reflected in reading patterns outside the university, and they helped set off a genuine upheaval in the literary canon.

I confess to misgivings about all these trends, especially the shameful neglect of poetry and the inexorable tilt toward the contemporary. Readers have grown impatient with the difficult and the unfamiliar. Through the first half of the 20th century, universities balked at teaching writers whose work had not yet found their historical niche. Dominated by scholars rather than by critics, literature programs took a curatorial approach to literary history, building monuments to authors long dead and safely canonized. They were agnostic about teaching the greatest modern writers, such as Franz Kafka or Marcel Proust, let alone postwar figures like Saul Bellow and J. D. Salinger. They felt that literary instruction should concentrate on works distanced by history or estranged by shifts in language and social customs. As they came to be influenced by the close reading methods of the New Critics, they saw poetry as the concentrated essence of literature. Prose works, especially fiction, were far easier to grasp, so why bother to teach them? Literature was part of a long tradition that had to be mastered as a whole, even when its links had been shattered. Students needed to be immersed in works hallowed by time.

In the aftermath of the 1960s, colleges tossed out many requirements, including core courses, survey courses, even distribution requirements. Students were encouraged to do their own thing, though they often had no idea of what that thing was. The undergraduate program at Brown became famous—and a big draw with

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Morris Dickstein's most recent book is *A Mirror in the Roadway: Literature and the Real World*. He has written in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR about Alfred Kazin, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and George Orwell. He is Distinguished Professor of English at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

high school seniors—for its taster's-choice curriculum. Competing for funds and students, departments everywhere grew more market driven. With precious little help from their elders, students cobbled together programs as if from a Chinese menu. Contemporary courses provided just the recipe for consumer satisfaction, not for historical breadth. As graduate and undergraduate programs featured more courses in recent literature, doctoral candidates began writing up-to-date theses on current authors. Most important of all, there was a rising tide of attention given to American writers who had once seemed of merely local interest—imposing figures in their time and place but scarcely of world class.

As an undergraduate at Columbia, I earned my spurs in the required humanities course—the Western classics from Homer to Dostoyevsky—but also signed on for a three-year survey of English literature from its medieval beginnings to 1900. It was an ambitious but Eurocentric literary education. Though I was an English major, I didn't take a single course in American literature, and I was never urged to do so. This blatant omission was largely my own choice. The American writers I'd bumped up against in high school bored me to distraction. Besides anthology chestnuts like "A Man Without a Country" by Edward Everett Hale, high school textbooks of the 1950s featured works by such cozy Victorian "fireside poets" as William Cullen Bryant and John Greenleaf Whittier in company with "O Captain! My Captain!"—Walt Whitman's least typical poem. The modern poets were Carl Sandburg and Robert Frost, decked out as harmless old gaffers dispensing cracker-barrel wisdom. (We also read *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*—too slowly to appreciate them.) The only American book that excited me in those years was Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, which I chose as the subject for a paper. When as a freshman in college I stumbled on Joyce and Conrad, a new world seemed to open before my eyes.

Trilling saw the American realists as crudely reductive and materialist, lacking the rich psychology and individuality pursued by their counterparts abroad.

Under the impact of the new modernist sensibility, the traditional American canon had already been drastically revised, but the news had yet to reach most high schools. Starting in the 1920s with critics like Lewis Mumford, D. H. Lawrence, and F. O. Matthiessen, Melville was rediscovered, Emily Dickinson was discovered for the first time, Stephen Crane's work from the 1890s was revived, and new writers like Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, and a host of difficult modern poets created a cultural revolution. But while advanced critics drew attention to some neglected American writers, including Hawthorne and Henry James, they cast others into purgatory, above all the social realists who had emerged from the ferment of the Gilded Age.

Only a generation or two earlier, William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, Theodore Dreiser, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, and Sinclair Lewis had weathered the antagonism of genteel taste to become the most celebrated writers of their age. In his later years, Howells, the friend of both Twain and James, had waged a campaign for realism in his magazine, where he sponsored the work of younger writers like Crane, Frank Norris, Hamlin Garland, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Abraham Cahan. They wrote dark, gritty books, quite unlike the historical romances that were bestsellers in their day. Inspired by Tolstoy and other European realists, Howells espoused fiction and poetry that did not glamorize their subjects and remained true to ordinary experience. Before the advent of the new modernists after the First World War, these writers epitomized everything that was frank and daring about modern literature.

Between the 1920s and the 1950s the reputations of these realist writers faded. Their subjects, which included poverty, greed, heredity, crime, and religious doubt, were bold for their time but now seemed dated; their style could be clumsy, their books badly structured. The pioneering realists could not match the

self-conscious art of the writers who emerged in the '20s or the psychological subtlety of their forebear, Henry James. Caught up in the social suffering of the Gilded Age, their comfortless books were tuned to the lower frequencies of American life. But during the early years of the Cold War, writers and readers turned inward, dismissing the politics of progressivism and protest as an intrusion. The Depression was over, America seemed on a roll, and the social criticism of the realists—indeed, the social novel itself—looked like something left over from another era. In "Reality in America," the influential lead essay in *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), Lionel Trilling compared the hard

social reality reflected by Dreiser with the more complex psychological reality in Hawthorne and James. Trilling was an ardent admirer of European realists like Balzac and Stendhal but suggested that their tradition, infused with personal passion and ambition, had never taken hold here. Ignoring their best work, especially Dreiser's *Sister Carrie,* Trilling saw the American realists as crudely reductive and materialist, lacking the rich psychology and individuality pursued by their counterparts abroad, including the expatriate James. Trilling's view became the critical consensus of the 1950s, the gospel that would be discarded by readers and scholars in the following decades.

When I was an undergraduate at the end of the 1950s, the works that seemed essential included Stendhal's *The Red and the Black;* Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma;* Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and *Sentimental Education;* Dickens's *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend;* Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina;* Conrad's *Heart of Darkness;* almost anything by Dostoyevsky, but especially his *Notes from Underground;* Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and *Genealogy of Morals;* Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents;* Eliot's *Waste Land* and *Four Quartets;* Yeats's later poems; Joyce's *Portrait* and *Ulysses;* the novels and stories of D. H. Lawrence; and so on. These reflected the modern sensibility of our teachers as well as the mood of the moment. They made up an international canon, strongly influenced by psychoanalysis and existentialism. Trilling had given up his course on American literature to teach these writers. He projected them as disturbers of the peace, unsettling originals, and he complained that his students had begun taking them for granted. He was quite wrong, for in those days the modern still had the power to unhinge us and challenge everything we had already been taught. They even became the lens through which we viewed their precursors in earlier centuries, some of whom we saw as modern before their time.

Everything in that canon, even the much-challenged work of D. H. Lawrence, is still vibrant today, but now I find that my students, like me, are drawn to books like Whitman's *Leaves of Grass;* Dreiser's *Sister Carrie;* James's *Portrait of a Lady;* Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson;* Howells's *A Hazard of New Fortunes;* Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* and his crisply ironic short fiction; Sarah Orne Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs;* Kate Chopin's *Awakening;* William James's *Pragmatism;* Wharton's *House of Mirth* and *Age of Innocence;* Cather's *My Ántonia;* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* Between them, Whitman and Dickinson have

eclipsed the whole of 19th-century American poetry, particularly those three-named New Englanders who trafficked in regular rhymes and conventional poetic diction.

In short, this is not your father's literary canon, nor was it mine when I was coming of age. It reflects the vast new interest in books by women and minority writers. And it flourishes outside the classroom as well, in adult reading groups and book clubs, including Oprah's, which went from living writers like Toni Morrison to earlier works by Carson McCullers and Faulkner; in repeated film and television adaptations; in the PBS series *American Masters*, which recently profiled Cather and Hemingway; and in the reassuringly uniform black volumes of The Library of America, which since 1982 has done more to establish the American canon than any other institution. It advanced the novel idea that American writers have a real corpus of work, to be read whole, not simply a patchwork of isolated successes amid agonizing failures. It challenged the truism that there are no second acts in American lives.

How did it happen that literary works that not long ago seemed provincial, even second-rate, came to be regarded as newly vital and compelling? In part it reflects the advance of the nation itself from a distant English province and a longtime bastion of isolationism to a world power. Parts of the world have always appreciated American writers more than we have. British readers lionized Whitman while he was still a disreputable figure here. The French enthusiasm for Poe was succeeded by a passion for Faulkner, a warm welcome for Richard Wright, and a fascination with hard-boiled film and fiction. The Russians published Dreiser and Jack London in huge editions, in part because their work was politically acceptable but also because it was couched in a straightforward realism that invited translation. Italian writers after World War II were deeply affected by Hemingway; in the hands of Cesare Pavese or Natalia Ginzburg, the impact of his work transformed Italian as a literary language. By the mid-20th century, the worldwide success of the new American writers and painters rebounded on their predecessors. The triumph of abstract expressionism awakened wonder about styles as different as the landscape art of the Hudson River school and the dour realism of Homer, Eakins, and Hopper. Faulkner and Hemingway lent a retrospective glow to Melville and Hawthorne. There were always skeptics who saw only a crude, primitive vitality in American culture, but the rise of American power commanded new respect for the originality of American art.

By the end of the 20th century, the growth of what we now must see as an American empire led to spasms of imperial self-absorption. The more our reach spread across the world, the less active interest we took in it. Cheap travel and instant worldwide communication gave us access to every corner of the globe, yet we seemed less curious about how other people lived. If we once felt like country cousins of European cultural traditions, more and more we began to show our arrogance, as if we had given birth to ourselves. As the rest of the world worked hard at learning English, we largely stopped studying foreign languages. We expected foreigners simply to become more like us, to speak our language, buy our technology, watch our movies and TV programs. We adopted their culinary traditions but could grow annoyed when they stubbornly persisted in speaking their own language. Literary translation, like film distribution, became a one-way street, *from* English to other languages. The provinces were now somewhere else as foreign visitors flocked to our shores. The inexorable course of modernization became synonymous with American influence across the globe.

Meanwhile, in the small world of literary scholars, art critics, and music critics, a new historical approach concentrating on the social context of art replaced a formal method that focused minutely on the works themselves. American literary classics, mistrustful of old-world influence, insecure about technique, rarely provided satisfactory material for a purely formal analysis. Ours is a tradition rich in failed masterpieces—great or near-great books in which the writer lost courage or concentration before reaching the last page. This faltering touch can be felt in works as divergent as *The Scarlet Letter, The Portrait of a Lady,*

Huckleberry Finn, and *A Modern Instance.* In this last book, perhaps Howells's most daring novel, the story's painful outcome—a failed marriage, abandonment, divorce—proved so disturbing that the author had a breakdown trying to finish it. But many American writers made up for their aesthetic shortcomings with their sharp social insight, which has proved as engrossing to today's readers as it was off-putting to Trilling's de-radicalized generation. Some of their current appeal is linked to politics—these writers were often matchless social critics—but their social views would not keep their books alive without genuine literary power. While nothing they wrote offers an ultimate key to the American experience, since no such key could ever be found, their books shed light on many significant features of our history and national character.

If historians better understood how to use this material, they would find buried treasure in the American literary canon, where urgent and still-troubling social problems take on a lived reality. No archival evidence could measure up to the vigorous treatment of immigrant life in Upton Sinclair's *Jungle,* Cather's *My Ántonia,* or Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep;* hardscrabble farm life in Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads;* John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath;* and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men;* social mobility and the American dream in Howells's *Rise of Silas Lapham* and Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby;* slavery, of course, in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass;* race in the work of Charles Chesnutt, Richard Wright, and many other writers; marriage and divorce in *A Modern Instance* and Chopin's *Awakening;* faith and doubt in Harold Frederic's once-famous *Damnation of Theron Ware,* which was one of Fitzgerald's favorite novels; the cut-throat money society in Wharton's *House of Mirth* and *Custom of the Country;* city life in innumerable novels from Howells, Crane, and Dreiser to Bellow. One could go on and on.

During the years following World War II, critics, reacting against the committed literature of the 1930s, saw many of these novels as defective simply because they *were* social novels, as if they were deformed by an extra-literary agenda. Today we no longer expect organic purity or structural perfection in works of art. We have come to question the very separation implied by the idea of a canon. We've become more aware of the mixed intentions of the writer, the complexities of all representation, and the limits inherent in language itself. Writers themselves could be eloquent about where they had fallen short. Faulkner, at the peak of his form, insisted that he had failed four times over in the four sections of *The Sound and the Fury,* each written from a different point of view. As readers we've learned to appreciate works with all their flaws and contradictions, above all if they have something powerful to say to us, as many long-neglected American classics still do. We see them not as belonging to a select circle of masterpieces but as part of the long continuum of our cultural history.

As readers we've learned to appreciate works with all their flaws and contradictions, above all if they have something powerful to say to us, as many long-neglected American classics still do.

A genuine sense of history is rare in America, where (as Philip Rahv once complained) nothing seems to last more than 10 years. Moreover, in recent decades realist novels have become a battleground in what the philosopher Simon Blackburn calls the "truth wars," test cases for the skepticism or relativism at the heart of postmodern literary theory. Some gifted scholars see the novels of American realists as vessels of ideology, blinkered by the cultural assumptions of their moment. They deny that literary works can convey the truth about anything, including their own subjects. In *The Social Construction of American Realism,* one of the best of these critical studies, Amy Kaplan defends her interest in these writers, and their historical value, without defending the accuracy of anything they wrote:

> If realism is a fiction, we can root this fiction in its historical context to examine its ideological force. How does the fiction of the referent become a powerful rallying cry for some, a point of contention for others, and an assumption taken for granted by still other writers at the particular historical juncture of the 1880s and 1890s? How do literary texts produce a social reality that can be recognized as "the way things are"?

Most readers, of course, are unconcerned about "the fiction of the referent"—that is, the illusion of actuality that these works convey. Ordinary readers harbor the unfashionable notion that these works are really *about* something. If a novel commands belief, or at least works well enough to suspend disbelief, readers are more than willing to follow where it leads, taking its people, its story, its milieu, and its social subjects as fully convincing. They understand that novelists frame their subjects subjectively, not impartially, and that this selection, or distortion, is precisely what enables them to go beyond mere documentation and to generate meaning. Accepting the identifications a good novel proposes to them, readers assimilate it as fiction at the same time they experience it as real, a process clever critics have belabored in vain. Strong readers identify with the predicament of Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth,* Carrie Meeber in *Sister Carrie,* and Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* without asking themselves whether things had to happen in just this way. Indeed, one source of power in the American novel has been its reflection of a woman's point of view, not simply in women writers like Stowe, Jewett, Wharton, and Hurston but in key novels by men, including *The Portrait of a Lady* and *Sister Carrie.* Leslie Fiedler once argued that all the great American novels were boys' books exploring male relationships, but this oft-repeated truism is confounded by most of the works mentioned here. It would be no exaggeration to say that second-wave feminism contributed more to the opening of the American canon than any other influence.

In the end, the rediscovered works of American literature stand several cuts below the greatest books in the Western tradition. Melville was a deep reader of Shakespeare, who lent fire and extravagance to Melville's language; but in his range of sympathy he was no Shakespeare. Howells's vast *comédie humaine* of American society cannot match Balzac or even Trollope on their own ground. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is Dickensian in its weaknesses as well as its strengths, achingly alive yet relying on sheer melodramatic intensity to tear at the heartstrings. At the other extreme, Henry James had too much refinement and subtlety, too little saving vulgarity, ever to become a world classic. Yet their books cannot fail to engage us as Americans, even as we are leery of any form of cultural nationalism. When America was merely a remote province of world culture, its educated elites were Anglophile, Francophile, or broadly cosmopolitan. Education was grounded in classical learning, a respect for the ancients over the moderns, and a deeply ingrained respect for old Europe's artistic heritage, though not its feudal and fratricidal politics. Only a few American writers, like Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and Twain, were strong enough to emancipate themselves from this suffocating respect.

Now America itself has grown multicultural while the whole globe is being turned on its head by modernization, by the new politics of the post–Cold War era, and by the juggernaut of American popular culture. When Alfred Stieglitz took up the cause of serious American art in the first decades of the 20th century, and when Aaron Copland did the same for American music in the '30s and '40s, they were engaged in an uphill struggle, for much of the world, including our audiences at home, were convinced that we had little to contribute. In recent decades that battle has been won. As the nation assumed its paramount role on the world stage, everything once belittled about the arts in America assumed far greater weight, at the same time that art itself was under siege. But we need to take care that this newfound dominance doesn't make us provincial again, incurious about other cultures or trampling on what they have to offer, expecting them to fall in line and become more like our own. ❖

The Reader Replies

GETTING IT ALL WRONG

Congratulations for printing in the Autumn 2006 issue of the SCHOLAR Brian Boyd's magisterial argument, which will, I believe, enjoy a long and influential life.

JASON EPSTEIN
New York City

It takes chutzpah to write an essay on a subject you don't know much about, but perhaps Brian Boyd assumes that the obscurantist dogmatists he caricatures in "Getting It All Wrong" will not bother to read it. Boyd's examples and language reveal that his notion of theory is frozen circa 1986, and that most of what he knows about it he learned from popular articles. To take only the most egregious example, he writes that "Derrida and his disciples think only in terms of humans, of language, and of a small pantheon of French philosophers and their approved forebears. . . . There was some excuse for Derrida in 1966, but there is none for the disciples in 2006." Well, Professor Boyd, there is no excuse for your failing to read anything Derrida wrote after 1966. If you're going to attack him for ignoring issues, it would be wise to ascertain whether he in fact ignored them. Apparently Boyd has never read Derrida's late work on, precisely, the animal. In "The Animal That Therefore I Am," which appeared in English translation in 2001, for example, Derrida writes that "there is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of 'living creatures' whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity." So much for thinking only in terms of the human, no? The essay —one of several on this very subject in Derrida's later writings—goes on to explore the fallacies not only of thinking anthropocentrically but of conceiving of language itself in singularly human terms. We could, he argues, think of language as something only humans possess if we construe it in precisely the fashion that Boyd condemns in the "poststructuralists," but that would be to ignore much recent relevant scientific work on animals and language. Throughout the essay, Derrida engages ("thinks in terms of"?) the writings of not only Heidegger and Nietzsche but Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Spinoza, and Bentham. If these are included in the "small pantheon" of "approved forebears," who would not be? For remarkable examples of "theory" that live up to Boyd's unnecessary (because already followed) prescriptions to take science seriously, he might have at least glanced at Cary Wolfe's *Animal Rites*, Alain Badiou's work on set theory, Giorgio Agamben's books on the animal, or Slavoj Zizek's engagements with contemporary cognitive science and consciousness studies. If Boyd had done such basic research on literary theory, though, he would not have been able to produce a shoddy, prejudice-confirming essay arguing (as the cover has it) that "If the Theory people bothered to read science, they'd realize just how silly they've been." I trust I don't need to rephrase that with Boyd as its subject in order to show just how amusing it is.

MICHAEL ROBBINS
Chicago

Brian Boyd replies: Michael Robbins assumes my knowledge of Theory is "frozen circa 1986." In fact I was prompted by and replying to a paper of Louis Menand that itself deplores the frozenness of Theory and asks what could bring about a much-needed thaw. Menand asks for a critique, but he does not know where the heat or the pressure should come from. But

what he does feel he can insist on is that the way out of Theory's icy impasse is "definitely" not consilience, E. O. Wilson's term for the attempt to link the natural sciences, most immediately the life sciences, with the social sciences and the humanities, for that would be "a bargain with the devil."

Perhaps Robbins's quarrel should be with Menand rather than with me. I have contributed to a forthcoming volume called *Knowing Animals* (Brill, 2007), edited by Derrida scholar Laurence Simmons and animal studies scholar Philip Armstrong. Introducing the volume, the editors proclaim an "animal turn" during the last two decades "comparable in significance to the 'linguistic turn' that revolutionized humanities and social sciences disciplines from the mid-twentieth century onwards." They also cite with approval both Bruno Latour and E. O. Wilson as striving to break down the barrier between the humanities and the natural sciences.

I think "the animal turn" a considerable overstatement. Animal studies exists as a subdiscipline, but on the margin. Menand, focusing nostalgically on the "greatest generation" of the 1960s, does not show any awareness of it, let alone any sense that it might thaw icebound Theory. And indeed animal studies as a humanistic subdiscipline will remain on the margin if it fails to engage fully with evolution and ethology, with biological theory and observation.

Derrida discusses the animal, in his characteristic way, through his punning neologism *l'animot*, part "animal," part "word," through discussing "the animal" in terms of language and human perceptions. So too had Heidegger, whom both Derrida and Agamben respond to. Heidegger had defined "the animal" as *weltarm*, "poor in world." Listen to Agamben patiently clarifying Heidegger's attempt to define the ontological status of "the animal":

> it is *offen* (open) but not *offenbar* (disconcealed; *lit.*, openable). For the animal, beings are open but not accessible; that is to say, they are open in an inaccessibility and an opacity—that is, in some way, in a nonrelation. This *openness without disconcealment* distinguishes the animal's poverty in world from the world-forming which characterizes man.
> (*The Open: Man and the Animal*, 2004)

Such writing only confirms my claim that theorists think, even when professedly considering animals, "only in terms of humans, of language, and a small pantheon" of forebears. Over the last half-century there have been many thousands of studies of different animals' capacity to understand their world, and nuanced research on the difference between vervet monkeys and capuchin monkeys, or scrub jays and pigeons, in capacities ranging from numerosity to Theory of Mind. Such studies make the work of Derrida and Agamben look impoverished and enclosed—frozen, in fact.

To disprove my charge about the small pantheon of approved forebears that Theorists refer to, Robbins cites Derrida's references, in discussing the human and the animal, to not only Heidegger and Nietzsche but also "Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Spinoza, and Bentham." These are indeed illustrious names, but all except the approved forebears are before Darwin, who overturned all we had thought about our relations to other animals, and who studied in detail the close relationship between the expressions of emotion in humans and other animals. Robbins does not mention Darwin, or Tinbergen, the founder of ethology, or Griffin, the founder of cognitive ethology, or prominent modern researchers like Frans de Waal, Marc Hauser, or Marc Bekoff, who actually *study* cognition in other animals and the relation of different aspects of animal knowing to human knowing. Had he, or Derrida, or

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Agamben, cited names like these—Agamben cites the early ecologist von Uexküll only because Heidegger, von Uexküll's contemporary, at least cites him before drifting off into his fog; but Agamben himself does not cite any contemporary biology—Robbins would have proved his point. As it is, he has only proved mine. Over the last few decades scientific work on the evolution of cognition, emotion, sociality, and morality in other animals has radically altered our sense of animal minds and has helped clarify the evolved basis of human cognition, emotion, sociality, and morality. Without attending to this research program, the humanities can only impoverish themselves.

SARATOGA BILL

I was quite disturbed to read the profile of Bill Reuben in the Autumn issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. It was certainly well written and charming but it profiled and praised a man who was a historical ignoramus and liar. It left the false impression that there is something to Reuben's decades-long crusade on behalf of Alger Hiss and the Rosenbergs. The overwhelming scholarly consensus, supported by material from previously closed Russian and American archives, is that Hiss and Julius Rosenberg were spies.

In his writings Reuben foolishly insisted that there were no atomic secrets to be stolen. He also shamelessly lied about material in Russian archives that I and other researchers have seen. It is, I suppose, entirely appropriate that he continued to spin conspiracy theories about a plot engineered by J. Edgar Hoover, Whittaker Chambers, and Richard Nixon to a writer who spun discredited conspiracy theories invented by Jim Garrison. But it is not something to which a journal like THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, with such a proud history of scholarship, should give its imprimatur.

HARVEY KLEHR
Emory University, Atlanta

Zachary Sklar replies: The "consensus" Klehr refers to consists of a handful of academics (and an unquestioning mainstream media) who accept at face value the conclusions of Klehr and John Earl Haynes in their book *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America.* Bill Reuben questioned those conclusions, and unlike some in the "consensus," Bill and other critics checked the book's sources—many of which are from the so-called Venona documents.

The problem is that these documents, released by the National Security Agency half a century after they were decoded and translated, are not nearly as reliable as Klehr suggests. For a detailed critique of Klehr's Venona interpretations, readers can go to "Venona and Alger Hiss" by John Lowenthal (*Intelligence and National Security,* Vol. 15, Autumn 2000) and "Cold War Ghosts" by Victor Navasky (*The Nation,* July 16, 2001) and make up their own minds.

As for Jim Garrison: his reputation suffered from a CIA-orchestrated smear campaign against critics of the Warren Commission (see CIA document #1035-960, April 1, 1967). But the House Select Committee on Assassinations found a "probable conspiracy" in the JFK murder, and approximately 90 percent of Americans now agree with Garrison's once-controversial contention that there was a conspiracy—including 50 percent who believe that the CIA was involved.

MY MOTHER'S BODY

I must confess that I was horrified by Mary Gordon's graphic descriptions of her mother's demise (Autumn 2006). She writes of rot and stench and revulsion, and as I read her memoir, I found myself praying that none of my children would ever so hideously expose me if I should lose control of my body or my mind!

Gordon reveals that others have been shocked by these "truths" but that she convinced herself that she wrote "for the good of others." Of what advantage to others are these stunningly bitter memories? I found myself comparing Gordon's terrible harshness with the gentle fun that Jonathan Franzen pokes at his mother, who had to have everything under

control, even when she was dying. His words were heartbreaking, but not horrifying.

Gordon's writing about the final days of a father in *Final Payments* was also shocking—but that was fiction. What responsibility does a writer have to speak the complete "truth" in the personal essay? Surely the line between the truth and the betrayal of those who can no longer defend themselves is not so fine.

MONICA B. MORRIS
Los Angeles

THE MAN WHO LOVED LANGUAGES

In "The Man Who Loved Languages" by Richard B. Woodward (Autumn 2006), the romance of searching for the *Ursprache* is highlighted, but the methodological difficulties of the Swadish/Greenberg/Starostin approach are underplayed. If I make a list of the words most directly corresponding in meaning between even such closely related languages as German and English, I could include such pairs as FLEISCH/MEAT, VOGEL/BIRD, HUND/DOG, HERBST/AUTUMN, and SNABE/BOY, thereby missing the close cognates (FLESH, FOWL, HOUND, HARVEST, and KNAVE, respectively). However, if I am free to search for possible "cognates" between distantly related (or even unrelated) languages, with substitution rules that take one sound into another almost at will, and with relationships in meaning existing mostly in the imagination of the beholder, all sorts of spurious matchups will be found (e.g., the Japanese verb *taberu*, to eat, must surely be related to English *table*, where we eat). If we assume that the correlation coefficient between lists of corresponding words in two languages is a measure of how long ago they diverged (the lower the correlation value the earlier the divergence), we will always get an answer, a date of separation, even if there was never a common ancestor. Processing gigabytes of gibberrish does not automatically yield sound scientific results. The analogy with biological kinship is seductive, but linguistics has nothing truly corresponding to nucleotide sequences in genomes. There is no reliable way to tell, prior to a written record, whether similar-sounding words in two languages are the result of a common protolanguage, a borrowing, or mere coincidence. The word for "coffee" is quite similar in all the languages I happen to know, but this has nothing to do with a common ancestral language.

I applaud Murray Gell-Mann's championing of this bold effort to push to, or beyond, the limits of historical linguistics. Fortunately, he doesn't have to worry about tenure or promotion. The academic linguists (few of whom know as many natural languages as he) are not even the peer groups whose approval he seeks. And he, if anyone, can appreciate the formidable epistemological hurdles that must be overcome to give this subject scientific credibility.

SOLOMON W. GOLOMB
Los Angeles, California

FINDINGS: BEARING GIFTS

The brief article by Anne Matthews in the Autumn issue titled "Bearing Gifts" was a charming bow to the idea of gifts. My note here, though, concerns the illustration used for the article. It is a detail of a mosaic in the sixth-century church of San Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy, showing the three kings bearing gifts. This particular section is often illustrated to identify this important theme, usually with adulation concerning its richness. Unfortunately, however, it is almost never remarked that this part of the mosaic decoration on the interior of this glorious church is mostly a 19th-century restoration of a vanished sixth-century work; thus, the essentially illusionist aspect of this image is totally out of character with the Early Christian style dominating almost all of the other areas in the church.

DALE K. HAWORTH
Santa Fe, New Mexico

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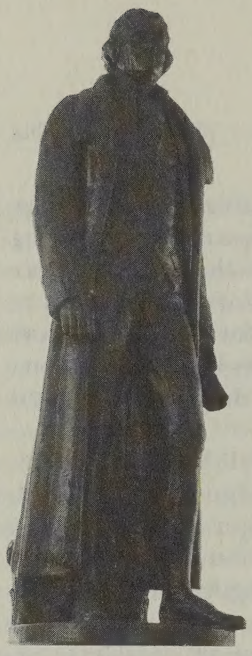

FINDINGS

Let the Parties Begin

By Barbara B. Oberg

At noon on March 4, 1801, in the Senate chamber of the Capitol, Thomas Jefferson took the oath of office as the nation's third president. The occasion is best remembered, perhaps, for the lasting reverberation of Jefferson's First Inaugural Address and, in particular, for his unifying and conciliatory exhortation that "we are all republicans: we are all federalists." Today's politicians frequently clothe their claims to bipartisanship with this phrase, but when speechwriters and even some historians quote it, they tend to capitalize Republicans and Federalists. Jefferson's written texts did not capitalize them, however, although many subsequent printings in newspaper broadsides did give a prominence to those words—an emphasis that the audience might (or might not) have heard. What did Jefferson really mean by the phrase?

I learned, as I searched for earlier formulations of the expression in Jefferson's writings, that he had paired the two words as early as 1792. He was seeking to understand a partisanship that he and some other leaders of the founding generation saw taking shape; he also wanted to come to terms with what it meant to be a federalist or a republican. What was the relationship between the Federalists, who had supported the ratification of the Constitution, and the federalist supporters of George Washington, who wanted peace with Great Britain and were suspicious of revolutionary France? Were the new republicans in fact Antifederalists, the old opponents of the Constitution?

Shortly after the 1792 elections, Jefferson, as secretary of state in Washington's cabinet, looked for common ground, writing that "those who felt themselves republicans and federalists too" would not be duped by the alarmists who wanted to equate republicanism with "the ghost of antifederalism." Six years later, in a political climate charged by the fears that sparked the Alien, Sedition, and Naturalization Acts, Jefferson made the same point, observing that both parties were claiming to be federalists and republicans, "& I believe with truth." For Jefferson, the expression had become a shorthand way of thinking about American politics over the partisan decade of the 1790s. The reuse of the phrase in 1801 merely solidified what he had already said. ❖

Barbara B. Oberg is general editor of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* and a lecturer with the rank of professor in the history department at Princeton.

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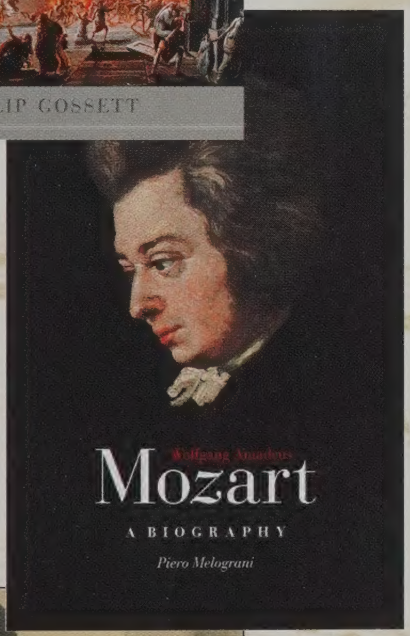

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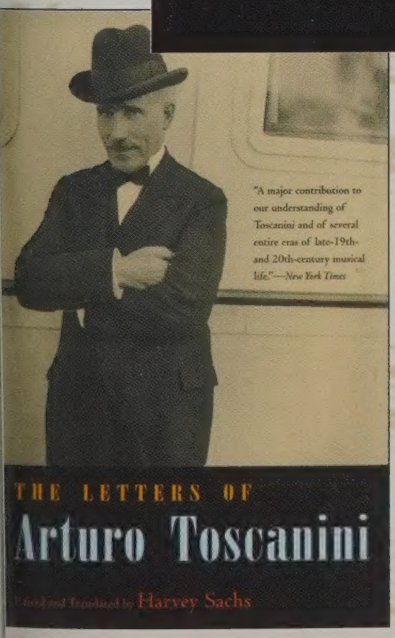
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